

radio stations and reviewers solely for promotion, achieved more airplay and interest than any of his studio LPs and more than his subsequent commercially-released double album recorded at many times the bootleg's cost.

When an act is well-rehearsed, recording can be relatively inexpensive. For instance, Van Halen's debut album, which is approaching platinum (sales of 1 million units), was recorded for \$54,000. Disco band Brass Construction spends a similar amount on their platinum-selling albums. When an artist owns his own studio and plays all the instruments himself—like Todd Rundgren did on *Hermit of Mink Hollow* and Ray Parker, Jr. did on *Raydio*—it's cheaper still. If the record company provides an advance of \$60,000, the artist subtracts a couple of thousand for tape and expenses and pockets the rest.

But those instances among hit albums are rare, and all producers and A&R men stress that lack of preparation is the prime cause of recording waste. Lack of planning doubled the original \$100,000 budget for recording Stephen Bishop's *Bish*. One session at Cherokee particularly upset co-producer Dee Robb: "Stephen booked a top arranger and a 30-piece string session for a three-hour session. He didn't like the arrangements, changed them on the spot, taking two hours, and the session ran overtime." In this instance, the lack of preparation cost an estimated \$6,000 extra. Terry Powell, West Coast A&R director for Columbia Records, cites experimentation and attitude, along with lack of preparation, as the main vices: "Quite often artists will be lax in showing up on time. They'll book a session for 8 PM and show up at midnight. In the cases where there are session musicians waiting around, this adds up. It's not uncommon for a party atmosphere to develop, people fall by. Recording attracts the cream in foxes, and this proves distracting and wastes time."

Experimentation and a lack of preparation caused the Tubes to triple their original \$80,000 budget for *Tubes Now*. One platinum jazz-rock act experimented on an eight-bar section of music (20 seconds) for 40 studio hours, utilizing different musicians—including a different drummer for the segment. Recording company executives tend to shrug and accept the process, yielding to "artistic temperament." "It's imperative that we give the artist as much leeway as possible," says John David Kalodner, West Coast director of A&R for Atlantic Records. "They're sensitive people, and they do what they have to do to make the best record they possibly can."

One wonders why so much experimentation takes place in those highly-priced recording studios, when rehearsal rooms are available to acts at considerably lower fees. Some companies, including A&M and Casablanca, have such space on a permanent basis, earmarked for their bands to work out their acts. Privately owned rooms can be rented in Los Angeles for as little as \$2 an hour and a top rate of about \$150 per 6-hour day, far cheaper than studio time.

Part of the problem is the tendency of musicians to do much of their work at the last possible minute—Mick Jagger writing song lyrics *after* the basic instrumental tracks have been laid down, for instance, is an example of an all-too-common practice. But even if the musicians themselves were to come to the studio completely prepared, there are still production techniques to consider. And producers, especially those searching for special effects, need the studio's board and playback equipment to hear what they're achieving. Producers who use up a lot of studio time, paid for by the record company, earn the gratitude of the facilities' owners. The debt is frequently paid back in "free" time, which the producer devotes to his own projects, which may not have hundred-thousand dollar budgets underwritten.

As for the low-cost rehearsal rooms, they're generally used for working out an act before it goes on the road, not into the studio.

Artists are using their "temperament" to dictate where they record. If they travel to Jamaica, Florida or Colorado, is it for a special studio, an ambient feel, or a vacation of sorts? Invariably the record company picks up the tab, not only for the actual recording expenses, but for travel and living accommodations. It's not uncommon for a rented \$2,500-a-month house, groceries, and phone bills to be picked up for two or three months or more. If, after moving out, a painting is missing and the record company is billed \$500 (even though it may have been a \$2.00 print), the company pays.

One prominent singer-songwriter traveled to England to record basic tracks for his just-released album, came back to Los Angeles—bringing a handful of musicians for overdubs—returned to England to finish the album and mix, only to

decide upon a remix in New York with a consultant producer, pushing the album's cost to \$175,000.

Roz Shrank, who pays the bills at Warner Brothers, is aware of abuses: "One producer frequently submits \$125 dinner bills, one wanted a car repair bill paid, and one of our artists usually cancels studio time once a month, and on the occasions it's block-booked (usually a week's time, blocked for better rates and convenience) that runs into money."

"Musicians are the worst businessmen," says Peter Noone, who was lead singer of Herman's Hermits back in the days "when albums didn't count."

"Artists aren't aware enough that whatever is advanced by their record company to cover the recording process, is recouped before they are paid royalties. So if they squander money and make an expensive album, they're really paying for it. (If it sells; if not, the record company absorbs the loss.)"

"Our first album cost \$5,000, and I doubt whether more than \$20,000 was ever spent on a Herman's Hermits LP, and they were all gold."

Artists' idiosyncrasies and temperament, combined with lack of planning, have produced some very expensive albums. Steely Dan's latest two LP's, Neil Diamond's *I'm Glad You're with Me Tonight* and Eric Carmen's *Boats Against the Current* cost in the region of \$250,000 each. Bruce Springsteen's *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is in the hefty \$300,000 range, and Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* neared the \$400,000 mark, (The *Rumours* of its day, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, cost \$60,000.)

Indeed, all the above examples have sold so well that the outrageous cost is little more than a curiosity. Yet there are white elephants. *Tubes Now* sold disappointingly, Dusty Springfield's current album cost \$160,000 and sold poorly, Van Dyke Parks' *Discover America* was an outrageous (for 1972) \$115,000 and failed to sell.

Ken Sasano, a director of product management at Columbia Records, speculates that his label has to sell one album for every cost-dollar to break even. (This includes advertising and promotional expenses). A \$100,000 album would require sales in the neighborhood of 100,000 units before a profit was made for the company. The artist would have to sell considerably *more* albums (royalties are generally less than a dollar an album) before royalties were pocketed.

For many, the attitude of recording has changed drastically. In the Fifties and mid-Sixties an opportunity to make a record was a dream come true. There was a certain excitement permeating the whole scene—an edge to the music as well. When producer Larry Page had 45 minutes left after an orchestra session, he rushed the previously unrecorded Troggs—waiting for 2 hours outside in their van—into the studio. They set up, got a sound balance, and recorded two songs in 20 minutes. The result: the million-selling "Wild Thing" and the English number one "With a Girl Like You." The Troggs' debut LP was recorded in three hours; the Rolling Stones' first album took four hours.

The point is that the art of recording has progressed where a band can't record a single for \$300 and have a major label release it. Question Mark and the Mysterians did just that in 1966 and had a million seller with "96 Tears." Record company A&R men will universally agree that today Beatles records would be rejected. "They'd be considered as demos and told to re-record them," says Terry Powell. A shocking thought, considering the *Sergeant Pepper* soundtrack's duplication of Beatle arrangements utilizing a 24-track machine (the Beatles used two synched four-tracks) fails to capture the musical depth of the original versions.

In England, where "new wave" music is a way of life, not merely a curiosity as in the U.S., Top Ten artists are churning out albums for considerably less than \$100,000. The Stranglers, who've averaged sales of more than half a million on each of their three LP's, recorded them for \$10,000, \$12,000 and \$15,000. Elvis Costello, who has impressed the U.S. market with two near-gold albums, recorded *My Aim Is True* for \$3,500 in five days and *This Year's Model* for \$8,000. (To be fair, studios and musicians are less expensive in Europe.)

"Those examples don't realistically apply to the U.S.," says Kalodner, who refuses to believe the Costello cost figures. By the same token, Kip Cohen prefers to lump new wave into its own category. All in all, the new wave's lack of presence on American charts gives it little credence among Stateside record companies.

The trend of high-selling albums this past year—*Rumours* at eleven million, *Saturday Night Fever* at 15 million, *Boston* at six million, *Foreigner* at four million—makes it easier for a label to accept the big-budgeted LP, yet companies are

"playing it safer" by signing fewer acts. "At A&M we're investing in our artists," says Cohen. "We know they may not make it the first time around. It took the seventh album to break Rita Coolidge, the third with Pablo Cruise, the fifth with Peter Frampton, and our third with Styx."

A sort of a the-medium-is-the-message situation has developed. As the technical/musical aspect of recording has overshadowed the emotional, the result has to be affected. Sure, today's recordings have more depth of sound and are more perfect musically, but generally lack emotion and spontaneity. For a prime example, compare today's relatively glossy soul/disco offerings with those exciting classics of the mid-Sixties.

Be that as it may, the exacting method of recording will push budgets even higher in the future. Bob Greenberg, vice president of Atlantic Records, seems to sum up the industry's viewpoint: "You have to understand, we want the best possible record that artist can make. If it means spending more money, we spend more money. We're not selling shoes, we're dealing with music, and you can't put a price on it."

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ock music, the subject of this article, is far and away the most expensive type to be recorded. That's because rock performers are, perhaps, more technically aware than the average jazz, classical, country or pop musician, and also because a rock act is more likely to enter the recording

studio with only a minimal idea of what's going to occur there. The rockers can get away with this kind of attitude because the potential return on such an album is considerably greater than on the typical jazz, classical, country or pop long-player.

Ed Michel, a jazz producer with some 20 years' experience, remembers the days when his boss at Riverside Records, Orrin Keepnews, "screamed at me for spending \$3,500 on an album." Today, Michel says that \$20,000 would be a decent budget for an album by a hypothetical 6-man working jazz band, taking three days to record, three days to mix and edit, and including transportation, housing, and payment of the players "from whatever's appropriate to much more than that, depending on the musician's bargaining power."

Michel says that the most he's ever spent on an album was in the range of \$25,000 while recording guitarists Howard Roberts and Mel Brown for ABC Records some years ago. The extra cost, he says, was the result of the company's "deciding halfway through the sessions that they wanted albums that would get radio play." The resulting change of emphasis entailed extra outboard equipment and studio time, hence the added cost.

While he admits that "\$6,000 is not an uncommon jazz budget" even today, Michel says that he's in favor of taking as much time in the studio as necessary, even though that's where most of the money goes. "After all," he argues, "one wants to spend extra time on an album that'll be listened to for the next 30 years."

Country albums are recorded by an almost assembly-line process, with little time spent on such extravagances as 10 hours' worth of guitar overdubs on a single number, a common enough practice during rock sessions. Chief expenditures on country sessions are for musicians—string and horn players, in many cases, in addition to the rhythm crew—arrangers, and background vocalists. Country budgets, like those for jazz albums, are generally well under the \$20,000 range for two or three days' recording.

Pop and classical albums are generally recorded "live" in the studio, with everybody playing and singing at once and little overdubbing save for the lead vocals. Again, payment to the supporting players and vocalists does much to determine the costs—a symphony orchestra, after all, numbers over 100 people, all paid that \$121 scale per 3-hour session; many pop producers will use twenty to thirty string and horn players on a date, in addition to rhythm and background vocals. Extra time and premium-priced producers can bring a pop album's budget up from a routine \$20,000 to several times that figure, though sales seldom justify the expenditure. While a #1 rock album might well sell a million copies or more, it only takes sales of 20,000-30,000 units to reach the #1 spot on the jazz, classical, or middle-of-the-road ("easy listening") charts.

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