

SOUTHBANK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

NOT A SECRET ANYMORE

With so many education facilities offering 'real world' audio production courses, it's refreshing to find one that delivers training on analogue and digital equipment in a purpose built environment, and the opportunity for students to gain valuable work experience at live gigs and festivals.

BY STEPHEN BRUEL

The Southbank Institute of Technology (Southbank Institute) is located in the middle of the Southbank precinct, directly across the river from the Brisbane CBD. With neighbours including the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, JMC Academy, the State Library and the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, this is Brisbane's cultural and arts education hub. Housed in a building completed in 2008, the Southbank Institute music department delivers three diplomas (music performance, audio engineering and music business) and boasts an impressive facility with a comprehensive list of digital and analogue audio equipment.

'FACE TO FACE' WITH IAN TAYLOR

Apart from teaching studio and live sound subjects, audio course co-ordinator Ian Taylor also designed the layout of the studios and how they would work together. With a background including work as a tour manager and FOH engineer for The Angels, live sound for The Baby Animals, The Divinyls and Keith Urban, and recording

Powderfinger's Blue EP in his co-owned Broken Toys studio, Taylor was well placed to undertake the design.

"I went to America with The Angels and got to mix a gig at the Whiskey in LA with The Angels, Angry Anderson, Axel Rose and Slash all on stage together," said Taylor. "Now that's rock and roll. I was in heaven."

TAYLOR TAKES A 'LONG LINE' WITH AUDIO EDUCATION

Additionally, Taylor has a long association with Southbank Institute.

"I started teaching part-time back in 1992 when we were still a TAFE," said Taylor. "Our contemporary music centre was founded by some of Brisbane's leading music representatives after lobbying the QLD Government for a college to prepare local musicians and technicians for the industry. Now nearly 20 years on I am still co-ordinating all things audio, looking after the incredible live room and main studio."

According to Taylor, the old studio, although it had a 'great vibe', grew too small. As the course was popular, and getting great results with ex-students working in every aspect of the industry, it was a natural progression to upgrade

to a larger facility to better service the needs of students and indirectly, Brisbane production companies.

"Tertiary education and on-the-job training must go hand in hand to be truly effective," said Taylor. "A large live show or important studio session carries a lot of responsibility and accountability that is very hard to replicate, let alone the pressure to perform. Having a facility such as our Rockschool, we can emulate a lot more real world scenarios. I also believe that education must be targeted for employment, whether that's touring the world, recording kids music or doing sound at the local pub. They all pay the bills, some better than others."

THE NEW STUDIOS

The new complex consists of studio A (main studio), studio B (smaller studio), a live room, four rehearsal rooms, three project studios, three computer labs and a sound lounge. The main studio has a Soundworkshop 34CMF analogue mixing console, an Otari MTR-90III 2-inch 24-track recorder, an Otari MX55 ¼ inch 2-track recorder, a Pro Tools 8 HD3 system, dual cinema HD displays and two x 3GHz Quad core Intel Xeon Mac Pro computers. There is also an eight-camera system for the main studio,

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Taylor with Southbank students.

control room, live room, rehearsal rooms and the sound lounge.

"The main studio has 11 spaces hanging off it, some linked by copper and others by optic fibre," said Taylor. "The set up allows us to record full live performances in the live stage area, with multiple high definition cameras for editing in Final Cut Pro and ProTools, as is the case at say 'Live at the Chapel' or any of the morning TV shows."

For monitoring in the control room there is Urei 813c room monitors with a single AT18" sub, Emes Blue HR active nearfield, Tannoy Reveal nearfield and Extron ceiling mounted speakers. The studio has JBL Control 5 and Martin Audio Blackline F10 speakers and S12 sub-speakers. Studio B is a smaller affair and consists of a control room and performance area. It has a Digidesign 003 interface running ProTools LE, a Novation midi keyboard, an iMac and is set up for 5.1 monitoring courtesy of Acoustic Technologies Sierra model speakers.

"Some of this gear we have had for 20 years and things have just grown from there," said Taylor. "We spent \$10 000 replacing the heads on the 2" machine. It's always good to teach the kids where it all came from. I still like to use the 1/4" tape machine for my delay when I print final mixes and using real rooms for reverb."

THE LIVE ROOM

The live room has a Yamaha M7CL digital console for FOH and a Soundtracs Megas Stage 32/8 analogue console for monitoring. The speakers consist of an Acoustic Technologies Blackbird TLA306 line array. There is also a small lighting rig with non-moving fixtures.

"The live room has a transformer

isolated split to the studio," said Taylor. "The main studio recording room is set up to record a band in one hit if necessary, with the main live room handling the kit and 5 isolation booths with varying reverb times for vocals, guitars and bass."

According to Taylor, isolation between all of the rooms is achieved by the rooms resting on separated floating concrete slabs. Reverb times and early reflections are achieved through the use of moveable ghost panels, and there is even a live room off the main room for recording the drum reverb.

"I have worked with floating timber floors in the old studio and found I didn't like the separation and what it did to my guitar cabs," said Taylor.

PROJECT STUDIOS AND COMPUTER LABS

The three project studios have a control room and playing room smaller than studio B, and consist of an iMac, ProTools 8 LE on Digidesign Mboxes, a Novation midi keyboard and 2.1 monitoring through Acoustic technologies Sierra model speakers. The three computer labs contain 50 iMacs with Mboxes running ProTools 8 LE and Logic Pro Studio 9, and Novation midi keyboards. The four rehearsal rooms have Yamaha MG82CX mixers, AT LPW02P Powered Wedges and are all linked by optic fibre to studio. The sound lounge has 5.1 monitoring, a high definition wide screen projector and is wired with camera and audio back to Studio A to record lectures.

Warren Huck from Brisbane-based Hux Electronics undertook all the wiring for the new complex.

"Working with Warren in the planning

process was great," said Taylor. "I designed it then he fixed it. The studio and live room noise floor is fantastic. The power star earthing system has been done with love and it shows. Get that wrong and you have a storeroom for expensive equipment, not a creative music-making environment.

Noise is something you don't care about till it's there and you can't get rid of it."

TAYLOR THE GEAR COLLECTOR

The facility boasts an impressive list of audio and musical equipment, much of which is from Taylor's personal collection.

"I own a lot of gear myself that resides in the studio including guitars, microphones, processors, amplifiers, drums and other cool bits and pieces," said Taylor. "The kids get to hear and see things that they wouldn't normally. The different sound of guitar pickups is an interesting class."

Highlights from this impressive list include Neumann, Rode, AKG and Earthworks microphones, SSL, Urei and Drawmer compressors and Lexicon reverb processors. Guitar-wise there is a solid selection of Gibson Les Paul models from the 1970s, and some more recent Fender Stratocasters, Telecasters, Precision and Jazz bass guitars. Amplifiers include Marshall stacks and combos, Fender twins and VASE valve models.

It is this real world environment of modern studios and live rooms, equipment and student tasks and projects, according to Taylor, that set Southbank Institute apart from other educational facilities.

"We integrate the music performance



program and the music business program, with our technical students recording studio albums and live performances to create learning activities that mirror the real world," said Taylor. "All this is done in-house with a guaranteed outcome, because we are self-sufficient."

REAL WORLD TRAINING IN THE UM...REAL WORLD

Technical students that show a love for the music industry and impress Taylor with their work ethic also have the opportunity to work at real gigs and events with him.

"For the last 15 years, I have been taking students to the Byron Bay Blues and Roots Festival where I'm the longest serving FOH audio engineer," said Taylor. "Having them work with arguably Australia's best crew and many major international acts is pretty special. A funny situation is that some of the kids are that young, that they don't know who they are working with. A couple of them thought 10CC were a cover band. So, a week away in that type of environment changes a student's perspective of what it takes to succeed in the industry. It shows what is out there if they wish to work their asses off. They always come back more focused than when they left."

THE STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

For current student Marcello Milani, the decision to study at Southbank Institute was made due to the fact that Taylor runs the course.

"I have friends who did the course in the 1990s and they always raved about the whole experience and it was clear that Ian had a lot to do with that," said Milani. "And industry-wise, it's also clear that in the live arena, Ian's students stand out from the pack ... erm, actually they are a large portion of the pack. I get to do stuff in the amazing recording studio here, and also get to do live gigs here and elsewhere, including the Byron Bay Blues and Roots Festival."

THE FUTURE

According to Taylor, the future of Southbank Institute is to always try to improve the teaching and learning environment, and keep up with current technology and applications.

"I will be doing a gig with some of my students where we have to mix 17 iPhones as an orchestra and I haven't done that one before," said Taylor, "We also plan to get all of our in-house shows streamed out of the studio on the web."



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