Recording from Anywhere –

A Story from a Digital Nomad with a Recording Studio in a Briefcase

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Just a few decades ago if you wanted to record an album or a song there were only a few options available. You could rent time in a expensive professional studio or invest in creating a personal recording studio, either building new structures or converting existing rooms into studio and control spaces. Building a studio is also expensive, and the space had to be large enough to hold all the equipment needed to produce high quality recordings.

Today, high-speed computer processing power and advanced software and peripheral hardware technologies make creating a portable recording studio more accessible and affordable. Unlike the large recording studios of the past, you can take these on the road with you. The recording studio has gone portable.

A professional recording studio might cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to construct, fitout and bring online. As Vincent (2018) states, a portable studio costs a fraction of that as it tends to assign multiple production tasks to a single device so that only a few pieces of equipment handle the same duties as a large studio full of 'offboard' gear.

The most important piece of equipment in any portable studio is the digital audio workstation (DAW). Depending on the type of software and the computer, a DAW could act as a recording device, mixer and sequencer. By handling so many tasks, a good DAW reduces the need for additional equipment.

Handling audio files requires a lot of computational power, particularly if you're mixing multiple channels of audio and midi. For that reason it is important to utilise a computer with a fast microprocessor. Walker (2022) notes that as long as "the computer you pick has a powerful CPU and a large, fast hard drive it will suffice, but most engineers opt for the Mac platform."

A second vital piece of the portable studio setup is the audio interface. While many computers have input and output ports for simple stereo sound, they aren't always capable of recording or playing back multiple tracks of professional-quality sound. The interface also acts as analogue-to-digital converter (ADC).

In addition to these elements, the portable studio also consists of microphones, headphones and a MIDI keyboard. To keep the overall size and weight to a minimum so as to fit the whole studio in a briefcase, in our setup we have chosen thinner XLR and HDMI cables than the standard guage. The HDMI also allows us to use TV monitors in hotels or other rooms as external monitors. A rollout piano keyboard acts as a portable MIDI keyboard controller

The 'Studio in a Briefcase' that we are using contains:

- **DAW**: Macbook Pro M1 Max 16"

- **Hard Drive**: 2TB external Solid State Drive (SSD)

- **Software:** Logic Pro X (10.7.4)

- **Audio interface**: Scarlet Focusrite 2i2
- **Other hardware**: Microphones – a pair of Rode M5 matched small-diaphragm condenser microphones and an AT4050 large diaphragm vocal microphone as per White (2012), ATH-M50X headphones, as Clark (2022) lists, a silicon roll out 88 key with USB as a suitable 'on road' midi piano keyboard, USB cables and various audio and peripheral adapters.

A Collaborative Music Project- conceived and delivered during covid lockdown.

Around 12 months ago, in September 2021, during yet another covid lockdown,

I was approached by my good friend, Rohan Cannon, a social worker and fine musician, from Sydney's Wayside Chapel to ask if I could come up with a song that could align with the philosophy and spirit of Wayside.

The Wayside Chapel is a charity and parish mission of the Uniting Church in Australia in the Potts Point area of Sydney that provides unconditional love, care, support and essential services for people experiencing homelessness and social isolation in Sydney (Dunn 2008).

The idea was to gather some heavy weights of the Australian Music Industry and record a song and film clip that could be used as promotional and fundraising piece. I immediately considered enlisting the help of my dear friend and long-time musical amigo, Brian Cadd. Brian is of course a legendary stalwart of the Australian Music scene and an award winning song writer and producer.

The brief for the song was that it should have an anthemic feel, ideally be sung by a number of artists and include a memorable chorus sung by a choir. This struck a memory response from me, as Brian and I had previously done some writing together in 2005 and had at that time, developed a verse and chorus of a potential song with the working title, "I Can Still Believe". As luck would have it, after rifling through various boxes of old tapes and CD's, I found the very rough demo recording we had put together at that time.

Brian and I presented this to Rohan at Wayside and his response was literally, "Shit, that's got potential!" We then set about embellishing the idea into a full track with new verses, a bridge section and an enhanced chorus as per the brief. I would point out that during this part of development, I was in Sydney, and Brian was touring in various parts of the country so all the collaboration was occurring remotely.

Once we had a new computer-generated backing track, using the studio at AMPA, Sydney, we added guide vocals parts using a brilliant Sydney session singer, Katie Carr, singing all the individual parts on the track. We now had a product we could use to enlist the support of our wish list of high-profile Australian artists.

And what a list it turned out to be, a who's who of great Aussie voices.

- **Glenn Shorrock:** Legendary Australian performer, founding member of rock bands the Twilights, Axiom, Little River Band and an inductee of the ARIA Fall of Fame.
- **Russell Morris:** Singer-songwriter and guitarist who had five Australian Top 10 singles during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Also, an inductee of the ARIA Hall of Fame.
- **Angry Anderson:** Australian rock singer-songwriter, television presenter-reporter and actor. He has been the lead vocalist with the hard rock band Rose Tattoo since 1976
- **Melinda Schneider:** Australian country music performer and recording artist.

All anchored by Brian Cadd's incredibly distinctive and emotional vocals leading the way.

Now to record to record, produce, and mix the final track in an extremely challenging setting due to the fact that most of the country was in lockdown and we had to somehow assemble these performers at various times and places to add their contributions to the project.

At this time, I was in Sydney and Brian Cadd was on the Gold Coast in Queensland. It was decided that he would use a recording studio there to record live musicians, drums, guitars and pedal steel guitar on the original computer track. I was able to join them live via zoom during this session.

Thankfully shortly after this, the Queensland border opened to NSW so I was able to travel there for the recording of Brian's lead vocals in December, 2021.

Things were now starting to gain momentum. We found a window for Glen Shorrock to record his parts, however, he was in Sydney and both Brian and I were in Queensland. So, thanks to zoom we were able to set him up in a studio in Darlinghurst, Sydney, while Brian and I directed him from Brisbane.

While this wasn't the ideal way to record and produce an artist, it was actually progressing quite well. Next it was Russell Morris, recording his vocals in his study at his home on the Gold Coast onto a laptop computer, and then over the next few months Melinda and Angry added their parts in similar scenarios.

During all the audio recording sessions we were of course filming the process on various devices, i.e. i phones, domestic cameras and professional film crews. Once all the lead voices were recorded it was time to add the choir and finishing touches to the track.

A choir made up of music students and folks from the Wayside community was assembled at AMPA in Surry Hills, Sydney, where all the vocal parts were added and the choir filmed by a crew singing along to playback of the song.

At the time of writing (September 2022) it has evolved into a 12 month project and is in the final stages of video editing. While the process was unorthodox and highly challenging, the end result is an example of how we were able to re-think the strategy and deliver an exciting and worthwhile project.

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