



Bohus Sound Studio

With a history that is intrinsically linked to the recording industry of Sweden, this Gothenburg studio has endured many changes of ownership and fortune in its 30 years. However, bricks and mortar endure as do dreams, professionalism and sound business sense. ZENON SCHOEPE

BUILT IN 1976 for Strepplers — Sweden's biggest country dance band at the time — Bohus Studio has a rightful claim to the title of 'the first studio in Sweden to be built correctly,' according to owner Dragan Tanaskovic. Built by Tom Hidley as a large control room and studio area for proper band recording, it's a very special place with a lot of character and charm.

The Gothenburg studio's history does, of course, include ABBA, who recorded here in the late 1970s before opening their own Polar studios complex in Stockholm, but it also takes in many other high profile Swedish acts and the occasional international act, such as Status Quo who recorded *Rocking All Over the World* here.

Much of the original 1970's Hidley design is still apparent in the 150sqm studio and 50sqm control room which smacks of retro vibe with a distinct 'disco' feel to some of the areas. Isolation is superb and the place is over-engineered with versatile alcoves and acoustic 'zones' plus the booths, which take in individual iso booths on the studio floor and the partitions afforded by the sliding glass doors between adjoining areas. The room sound is extremely natural and it's interesting to note that editing sessions are often performed in the live area because the space is so comfortable to live and work in.

It's also an equipment goldmine with a selection of analogue 16 and 24 track machines, 2-tracks and

ProDigi and DASH behemoths and outboard racks that are crammed with the highly desirable and the rare and wonderful.

But things have not always been so stable with the last 30 years seeing many changes of fortune and ownership. The Strepplers connection ended in 1980 and the studio changed hands regularly throughout the 1980s until it ended up being used as a warehouse.

'I'd been to this studio to record as a musician in 1986,' explains Dragan. 'I had built a smaller studio in the centre of Gothenburg and I called the owner of this building and asked if the studio was available to hire. He'd only just rented it out as a warehouse but he took my number and one and a half years later he phoned me up. That was 1993 and in the first instance I rented the building and bought it in 1998.'

Dragan started with an MCI 600 and accompanying 2-inch, but he raised the bar with the purchase of a 64-channel SSL 4k in 1996. He started renting rooms at the back of the building often fitted with the equipment that was left over from upgrade process, which was relentless. Dragan admits to having gone through a crisis of confidence towards the end of 2000.

'I was asking myself "Why is it that I don't enjoy doing this anymore, why isn't it fun?"' he says. 'I realised that this race for buying stuff, trying to have the best things, was driving me mad. I decided to



pay off all my debts so I could own everything that I had and that's what I did. I sold the SSL and some other stuff and paid off my bank and everything apart from the mortgage on the building. Then everything began to be more fun again! I had ended up doing gigs that I didn't want to do just to pay off the bank and that was frustrating for me.' He ended up with a Euphonix CS3000 which he ran with Pro Tools and all the machines he had. Part of the streamlining released cash for him to build a mastering room in 2002 and this is what Dragan concentrates on now.

Yet in 2005 he replaced the Euphonix with a Neve VXS. Rather than signalling another round of Dragan's spending, it marked the arrival of Tobias Lindell, an engineer/mixer with a DJ background, and together they've launched the Bohus Entertainment production company. The Euphonix is being housed in a new lower priced studio built in what was previously the studio's large and grand reception area. The pair have a plan and a lot of energy.

'Business has changed lately and the requests for a cheaper room have proved strong,' explains Dragan. 'We noticed that we lost some gigs to other studios and to be competitive with those types of job we won't drop the price in the Neve room but we will be able to accommodate them in the new Euphonix room.'

These lower price jobs do lead to repeat business and Dragan says it's better to get those clients on the Bohus Studios ladder rather than somebody else's. 'It means they can mix the two single in the Neve room and the rest on the Euphonix rather than the whole lot at some other studio.'

The cheaper production room will be able to accommodate the in-house productions as well and keep the big room flexible to still accept bookings. Prices are remarkable at £350 a day for the Neve room and £250 for the Euphonix — also making the



facility highly attractive to foreign business.

Dragan says that once you set a price you have to stick to it, and that means it must be realistic to begin with. He says it's better business to build another room that can work for a lower rate if you can, than drop the rate of your best room. Reducing debt, owning the building and being established as a high-standard facility means they can. 'I remember five years ago everyone was telling me I should have this studio in the centre of Gothenburg where everything is happening,' he says. 'Yes, perhaps I should have but it was expensive and, today, look who is still here!'

The mastering also fits in with this plan and serves as the biggest source of income for the facility. 'Many of the record producers are not 100% certain if their mixes are ready for radio or CD and they need an extra pair of ears,' comments Tobias. 'And they also don't want to have the final responsibility — they can blame it on someone else if it's not good!' adds Dragan.

'To me, you're not an engineer just because you've bought a sound card, but a lot of people today think they are,' he observes. 'They buy a small Pro Tools, Logic, they mix their own stuff. Mastering has to

compensate so much for a bad mix now — it was supposed to be a final touch! There is now such a big difference between the final master and the final mix and it was not supposed to be like that. Ten years ago everyone had a good engineer, producer, professional studio and of course the albums sounded better because there were professional people involved. Today the producer is mixing the album he is producing and recording — he's more into the musical thing but he has to take care of the other bits because he can't afford to go to a studio and hire an engineer. The only thing he doesn't want to do is master it himself even if he does have the plug-ins!'

Tobias is now doing progressively more rock work in line with Sweden's high quotient of rock bands and Gothenburg's position at the centre of its Heavy Metal universe. Dragan says their skill sets are extremely complementary and he now has a very level-headed attitude to studio ownership and what makes a good and successful business. 'It's not about the gear but certain elements of it tell the client that you are serious,' he says. 'Then it's all about the result and once you've achieved that you don't actually have to do any more than that. If you show that you know your stuff and give them good results then they will come back whether you buy another ten boxes or not.'

'We're very keen on getting people to buy the package here — recording, mixing and mastering all here,' says Tobias. 'It's a way to control the production and its quality and to get the best result,' adds Dragan. 'We want people who come here to feel very comfortable and safe about what they're buying.' ■

Contact

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