



Park Studios

NIGEL JOPSON visits a treasure-trove of recording in a legendary Swedish facility

From the outside, Park Studios has the unassuming look of a regional community hall — because, upstairs — it is! Upstairs is old 150sq metre hall with a 6m-high ceiling, which can be conveniently connected to the studio below via 32 tie-lines. “It’s possible to rent the hall to record strings, and I’ve recorded huge-sounding drums in there because it’s completely un-treated acoustically,” explains Stefan Boman, engineer/producer and co-owner (with Swedish band Kent) of Park Studios. Boman started his audio career in 1995 working at the world famous Polar studios, built by ABBA. He became the main in-house engineer for Polar Studio A, working with acts like Def Leppard, Burt Bacharach, Alice Cooper, Chic and Backstreet Boys to name just a few.

Park Studio was built in 1976, and a lot of ‘80s European hits were recorded there. “We bought it in 2004” says Boman. “I wasn’t really looking for a studio this size, I was looking for a small control room to do my own productions. Fortunately I managed to persuade Kent to join me and take it on as an investment.” Kent are well-known in the Nordic countries as one of the biggest acts in Sweden. The band has had numerous radio hits throughout Scandinavia and consecutive #1 studio albums

on the Swedish charts since 1996, winning multiple Grammys and other awards. They’re one of those European groups which started out as indie bands, but have taken their



/ Stefan Boman in the recording room, in front of just some of the guitars available.

audience with them on a long career — embracing production values of the moment — keeping the fan bond alight with strong songwriting skills and native-language lyrics. “Working with them has been quite challenging and fun, because you’re never repeating yourself”.

Park Studios hosts mostly rock and pop sessions — with quite a few jazz projects as well — Boman won a Swedish Grammy for a jazz project with Amanda Ginsburg. The recording room has a welcoming, lived-in vibe, with comfy seating and plentiful backline already set up. “I did some records in New York, at Electric Ladyland — they have a lounge in the recording room and that’s so nice — it inspired us to make the recording room here feel like a ‘home’, so you can relax” explains Boman. Park has about 40 guitars — yes, forty — and compared to many studios these days there’s a lot of backline. “We have a nice piano, Slingerland (1977) Ludwig Big Beat (1970) and Gretsch (1974) drum kits, piano and a harmonium...”

Bountiful backline

The complement of guitar heads reads like a menu of classic amplification — Ampeg, Epiphone, Fender, Gibson, Hiwatt, Magnatone, Marshall, Matchless, Orange, Roland, Supro, Vox — the studio’s collection is probably only surpassed in Europe by Belgium’s IPC Studios. “I did a three-week recording session with Kent at Electric Ladyland in New York” Boman reveals. “To rent the vintage amps in New York they wanted on the session... it turned out to be cheaper to buy them! So that’s what we did instead, and brought them back.”

For the recording engineer, the extensive mic list on the parkstudios.se website has already been supplemented by the addition of several extra classics: “We just bought three Neumann M49s, so we can have a DECCA tree, we have two Telefunken ELA M 251... and we also just

bought a C12.” Why, yes: if you already own the ‘50s stereo AKG C24 you *would* want the classic (earlier design) AKG C12 as well, because... well, the ‘Grid’ biasing arrangement in this rare-as-hens-teeth vintage classic might deliver a slightly sweeter sound. There can be few studios in the world where one is faced with the tricky conundrum of choosing from five different *pairs* of ribbon mics for a stereo set-up: AEA R84, Coles 4038, RCA 77-A, RCA 44-BX or Royer R-121? Wait, we forgot the Beyerdynamic M160 — have you got two of those? “Yes!” The cost of flights to Sweden from Los Angeles would rapidly be amortised by subtracting the daily LA session rental bill for the classic kit which comes ‘as standard’ at Park Studios!

The gear lust continues as we enter the control room. An Avid S6-32 channel occupies the sweet-spot for mixing, and then there’s not one but two legendary analogue consoles adjacent. The S6 was chosen because: “You can’t really work on an all-analogue console for mixing these days, there are too many recalls to make mix changes and so on. I still wanted to be able to mix on faders, it doesn’t sound the same for me when I do it on mouse and keyboard. This for me is the best of both worlds — if I’m having fun and being inspired — it’s going to turn out better!”

Two classic vintage consoles

To the left of the S6 is an EMI TG12345. I have only actually seen two of these mixers before — at Olympic, where there was an ex-Pathé-Marconi TG which could be moved between control rooms — and at British Grove (*Resolution* V16.4). “These consoles were never sold, but were made by EMI in the UK for several of their global subsidiary studios,” explains Boman. “Many of these desks have been ‘parted out’ to modules now. This TG12345 Mk III mixer came from EMI Netherlands, but we bought it from a guy in Florida, who had restored it really well. It’s in perfect working condition now, the original build quality was so good. It sounds really, really great on most music. The first time I heard EMI electronics, was when we mastered a record at Abbey Road and they had those Transfer Consoles, which are the same EQ and so on. When they switched it in I thought — oh, it sounds like tape! It’s fatter, a little louder, I really liked it and since then I have been looking for an EMI console for many years. I mostly use the EMI on guitars, because it really seems to glue the tracks together and add some edge to them. The compressors are kind of aggressive and really analogue-sounding.”

To the left-hand side of the mix position is a Neve 8058 (28/16). This — the most sought-after model of vintage Neve — has fixed its place in recording history with a full-bodied ‘Fleetwood Mac-style’ sound. Clearly a significant investment, we were curious as to how such a pristine-condition vintage legend had found its way to rural Sweden. “I was looking for something on the scale of this Neve,



✓ The recording room with bountiful backline

and when I saw it advertised I thought for sure it would be in the US,” reveals Boman. “But actually it was located in Malmö in the South of Sweden, Varispeed Studios! He had owned the mixer for something like 25 years.”

The Neve wow-factor is matched by several racks of drool-worthy vintage outboard, on a scale probably only matched by obsessive collectors like Michael Brauer. We noticed a rare vintage Maxson/Tri-tronics compressor — a secret weapon for snare explosiveness — in this generous outboard rack: “It’s a department of Commerce CA-1352A. The outboard rack is probably close to twenty years or so of collecting. I have some very old Pye compressors, I really love those for overheads and drums — and this RS124 came from Abbey

Road as well!” In fact, there are so many classic items we suspect a ‘fixed setting’ Lord-Alge style approach to mixing. “I choose some units for colouration when I’m recording,” confirms Boman, “But when I’m mixing I do have a ‘mix setting’ for all the outboard, for easy recall.”

For reverb, every era of analogue and digital reverb is well represented, from the (massive) EMT 140 plate, AKG BX-15 Spring, EMT 250 ‘Gold foil’, EMT 251 (‘R2D2’ — radiator model), AMS RMX16 and a Bricasti M7. It’s like a chronological tour of *Resolution* editor’s career.

We asked about the monitoring, which looked like a Genelec playbook. “Our main monitors are Genelec 1038, which were fitted immediately after we bought the studio. But I’ve just been working on a 5.1 surround mix, for



✓ The amazing Neve 8058 with EMI TG12345 in background

Swedish prog-metal/rock legends Opeth, for their long-awaited 13th album *In Cauda Venenum* which I co-produced with them, which is why I have the Genelec 'Ones' monitors set up around the Avid. It seemed like the perfect project to do in 5.1 because there is so much happening in the music. Opeth recorded strings in Angel Studios in London with a 20-piece orchestra for seven of the songs on the album. We spent five or six weeks recording here, and then mixing for three weeks. The 5.1 took an extra couple of weeks to adapt, it seemed like this project was really meant to be in 5.1. Incredibly talented musicians and super-nice, it's the most fun I've had for a long time!"

Boman is a long-term Genelec enthusiast. "I have worked on Genelec monitors for years — in fact I introduced Genelec 1030s to ABBA's Polar studio to replace the NS10s — for me it has to sound fun to mix on! With NS10s you are constantly miserable, then you're a bit less



/ Park Studios has a relaxed vibe



/ You'd never guess there's a studio inside!

miserable and you know you're probably done!" We know what you mean, Stefan... "I switched to the 8351s about one week before doing a Kent mix, I actually decided to get them after

mixing on a pair in a studio in Iceland. I was blown away by the imaging. It seemed to me the first time you can hear exactly where things are. Before it was 'is it Left, Centre or Right?' With the 8351s it's like 'the panning is five degrees off!'"

For production pros, Park Studios is like an Aladdin's cave of collectors' gear. But the recording vibe is great as well, with a relaxed feel to the main live room, plenty of outboard, several booths for isolation and the big hall upstairs for more ambient recording. Several hotels within ten minutes walking distance, and a newly refurbished kitchen and eating area, make this a cool location for any European-bound band recording project.

Every now and then, we have the privilege of visiting recording studios in various corners of the globe. Park is one of those facilities whose vibe is so understated you come away wondering — do musicians and producers *know all this stuff is here?* Well, you do now! Cool part of Europe, unbelievable cornucopia of vintage equipment — and really nice people. It was a pleasure to visit. 

www.parkstudios.se



/ The 150sqm hall upstairs is great for string recording