

Studio File

VOX RECORDING STUDIOS,
LOS ANGELES

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Los Angeles probably contains more music production spaces than any other city. These include legendary recording studios, film scoring stages and corporate facilities; but there is also room for a different breed of studio, ploughing a more individual path. Vox Recording, located right across the street from Paramount Studios in Hollywood, is a perfect example. Compared with the world-famous, Bill Putnam-designed studios located a few blocks away, it purposely flies under the radar; yet Vox has a stellar history and is frequented by some of the industry's greatest names.

Electrification

Initially named Electro-Vox, the business was started in a disused restaurant by Bert Gottschalk, a movie sound man who wanted his own recording venue to cater to the thriving radio industry. It has operated continuously since 1936, and may well be the oldest independent recording studio in the world.

An independent recording business was very unusual in this era, when the few studios that existed usually

Possibly the oldest independent studio in the world, Vox was built in 1936, and its layout served as the template for the celebrated Gold Star Studios.





This Ampex recorder was among the first handful of eight-track machines ever made.

belonged to radio stations or record companies. Gottschalk set up shop opposite the NBC studios on Melrose Avenue, and one of his first jobs was recording broadcast programmes for the likes of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, as well as so-called 'air checks' through special phone lines. Electro-Vox was also used for demo recordings for Paramount artists.

The 1950s would bring many changes to the business: magnetic tape was introduced to the recording process, the studio started producing radio commercials for clients such as the LA Times, and Capitol, who took over the NBC radio station for a few years, sent their artists to rehearse and record demos. Other well-known artists and composers who used Electro-Vox include Henry Mancini, who recorded the first version of 'Moon River' there, the Nat King Cole Trio, Johnny Mercer, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

Among Electro-Vox's employees in the '50s was Stan Ross, and history has it after being denied a pay rise, he left to start the famous Gold Star Studios up the street, copying the layout of Electro-Vox to the tiniest of details.

In the 1960s, Bert Gottschalk's son Alan took over operations, and during those years the infamous





Woodrow Jackson's incredible gear collection includes this selection of guitar amplifiers.

» Wrecking Crew recorded many sessions at the studio. Bert and Alan Gottschalk kept their business until the turn of the millennium, after which the studio was run by composer and producer Joey Altruda for nine years, before current owner Woodrow Jackson took it over.

Living History

Jackson, a multi-talented individual who once serviced Mellotrons and who has toured as a guitarist with the likes of Vincent Gallo and T-Bone Burnett, is today mostly known because of his accomplishments as a composer and producer. As a player, he contributed to soundtracks like David Holmes's *Ocean's Twelve*, and he composed video-game scores for *Red Dead Redemption*, *LA Noir* and portions of *Grand Theft Auto V*. Jackson's vast instrument and studio gear collection has become one of the studio's greatest assets. Now renamed Vox Recording Studios, he uses the space for his own projects, but it is available for outside clients too.

Woodrow Jackson first stepped into the 80-square-metre Studio A live room as a player in the Altruda era, and immediately fell in love with it, describing it as having a "controlled echo like when you are sitting on top of a mountain, comparable only to the legendary Capitol Studio B". The studio also includes the smaller Studio B live room

and two control rooms, as well as ample storage space — and the place is filled to the brim with one of the most remarkable instrument collections in the world. Every bit of kit comes with a story, none more so than the Studio A console, a custom DeMedio desk commissioned in 1967 for Wally Heider's Studio C in San Francisco. Based on Universal Audio 1108 preamps and 508 EQs, it was upgraded to a 16-bus architecture a few later, employing API 325 cards as channel amplifiers as well as 24

channels of API 560, 554, 550 and 550A EQs. It was used on the Beach Boys' *Smile* sessions and on many classic records. The germanium transistor-based Neumann desk in Studio B, meanwhile, came from Sunset Sound Studio 3.

The valve-based Ampex recorder in Studio A is one of only three units made directly after Les Paul's own tape machine, and before Ampex started commercial production » of this type. According to Jackson, it's the "most used thing in this building". Other

This very vibraphone can be heard on the Beach Boys' classic *Pet Sounds* album.



unique "things" include a set of toms owned and played by Wrecking Crew drummer Hal Blaine, a 1940s Radio King drum set that was played by Irv Cottler for over 15 years on stage with Frank Sinatra, a vibraphone that was used on the *Pet Sounds* sessions and many more instruments of comparable provenance.

Word Of Mouth

The first projects Woodrow Jackson did at Vox after he took it over were the sessions for the *Red Dead Redemption* soundtrack. Some of the players he used recommended the studio to Danger Mouse, who brought in Norah Jones to record their 2012 collaboration *Little Broken Hearts* there. The client list Vox Recording has built in the past five years is just as incredible as its history and gear collection. Arctic Monkeys recorded *AM* at Vox; Portugal The Man, Vampire Weekend, Beck, Suzanne Vega and Joanna Newsom have tracked albums here; parts of Adele's *25* were laid down at Vox, and other clients include Alabama Shakes, Dap Kings, Elton John, Lady Gaga, Lana Del Rey, Money Mark, Ry Cooder, St. Vincent, Steve Albini, Tangerine Dream, War On Drugs and the Black Keys, to name but a few. 



Originally based on Universal Audio modules, the Studio A console was later expanded with API modules.





Studio A's custom DeMedio console was built for Wally Heider in 1967.



The Langevin Progar 119A was one of the first compressors ever made.



The Studio A control room.

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