CRYSTALPHONIC FINDS ATC, Z-SYSTEMS AND BRAUNER THE PERFECT COMPLEMENT

ATC Loudspeakers selected as monitors for Crystalphonic Studios designed by AAA Design Group and owned by producer Kevin McNoldy.

Four Brauner microphones (two VH1s and two Klaus Heyne Editions) have front row status in the Crystalphonic Studios microphone cabinet. (PHOTO CREDIT - for both images): Pete Cronin 2003)

CRYSTALPHONIC FINDS ATC MONITORS, Z-SYSTEMS DETANGLERS AND BRAUNER MICS THE PERFECT COMPLEMENT

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA: Crystalphonic Recording Studio was officially launched in late June, opening its doors to reveal a very high-end, state-of-the-art facility capable of seeing any project through from tracking to mastering. Four rooms, three featuring ATC (Acoustic Transducer Company) main monitoring and all tied together with Z-Systems Detangler digital cross-point routers, cater to recording and mixing, 5.1 surround production, audio post production, and mastering. And while the studio's mic cabinet houses an impressive array of vintage and modern choices, four Brauner microphones (two VM1s and two Klaus Heyne Editions) have front row status.

"We consider ourselves primarily an ATC studio," states producer and studio owner Kevin McNoldy, as he enumerates the ATC systems at Crystalphonic. "In the A room our flush-mounted mains are the SCM300As. We chose those because they are the ultimate in-wall speakers. In the B room we have the ATC SCM20As with the sub, a full 5.1 set. Those are an amazing set of speakers. I can't say enough about the way it sounds in that room." A pair of ATC SCM100As is featured in the D room, a mastering suite on the second floor.

A competing brand of 5.1 monitors was originally planned for the B room, McNoldy reveals. "We finished the room, but then modified it to get the bass extension tighter. The better the room sounded, and the tighter the bass response, the worse those speakers sounded. We'd built the room to a quality where you could hear every flaw in those monitors. We sold them and put the ATCs in. It was the perfect match."

McNoldy relates that he first experienced the ATC monitors when Roger D'Arcy and Nick Whitaker from AAA Design Group, whose Recording Architecture division designed the Crystalphonic facility, took him for a

demonstration at a post house in Richmond, Virginia. It took only five seconds of playback of a CD that McNoldy had produced to convince him the ATCs were the way to go. "There was no question - it was everything that I've ever wanted to hear in a speaker."

Having ATC main monitors in the three rooms not only offers perfect translation of projects but also speeds the work process, according to McNoldy. "I've never had low-end translate so well before. You're shaping your high frequencies accurately, because the ATCs are so revealing, but what you can hear in incredible detail, especially on the SCM300s, is the important low to mid frequency range. It's what makes or breaks a mix for me."

"The traditional way of doing things was to mix, then take a reference home or listen in the car. I don't really need to do that anymore, because I find I'm not second-guessing the process as much, which helps me move faster. And it's perfect to get the final version on ATCs up in the mastering room after mixing in the A room or completing a 5.1 project in the B room."

Z-Systems Detangler Pro digital cross-point routers interconnect all four rooms at Crystalphonic. "In the A room we have a z-64.64r," McNoldy elaborates. "That serves all the digital reverbs, processors, and the 96-channel Pro Tools rig that are in the A room, but it also serves as a matrix for all the other rooms to speak to each other. From the A room you can actually control the entire facility if you want to. You can use the Z-Systems by itself, or you can set it up so that every room feeds off of it. Rooms can get stems digitally, or you can route the mix to the mastering room while mixing to get a feel for any changes needed to perfect the sound."

He continues, "In B and C, we have the z-16.16r in each room. They're smaller setups, but it's the same concept. They can handle everything in the room. They have four stereo lines that tie into the main system matrix, so you can funnel things back and forth between rooms. Then, in the mastering room, we have the z-32.32r. Again, it handles everything in the room and it subs you into the main system as well."

The Z-Systems routers are central to McNoldy's design philosophy at the studio. "There's a lot of complexity in the signal flow of the facility, so no matter what's going on in any studio you can always borrow a piece of gear, analog or digital, and you can route around a room. If you want to grab a certain piece that's in the SSL room, for example, you can send a discreet text message to the engineer. He can type in on the Z-Systems remote to patch in to you and you can control it from your room. That's one of the greatest strengths of the Z-Systems routers."

Crystalphonic fields an impressive collection of vintage and current microphones, but McNoldy lists four Brauner microphones among his personal favorites. "We have a matched pair of VM1s and two of the VM1 Klaus Heyne Editions, one set up for female vocals, one for male vocals. All four of them are incredible microphones. We own a great deal of vintage microphones, and the Klaus Heyne Editions always fare equal or better when we do vocal tests. They have the same thick, rich tone that many vintage microphones exhibit, but there's less noise and more dynamic range."