



# HYBRID HOPES

ECHOPLANT RECORDING STUDIOS'  
FRESH WORKFLOW FOR A FAMILIAR SPACE



By Andrew King

Ryan Worsley spent the first 10-plus years of his recording career proving the point that you don't necessarily need to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on a large-scale studio packed with expensive equipment to make a great-sounding record.

A humble and understated fellow, he wasn't doing it by shouting from a figurative soapbox, militantly debating the point on recording forums; instead, he just let the quality of the work he was doing at Echoplant Studios – his home-based home base – speak for itself, slowly but steadily building a body of work that would rival the output of any recording facility, large format or otherwise, on the west coast.

As the profile of some of his earliest collaborators grew to the national level, so too did the demand for his services. By the second half of 2015, after working out of his home studio for over a decade, his schedule and workspace were teeming – with gear, with people, and with potential.

As the adage goes, you have to be good to be lucky and lucky to be good.

So as luck would have it, in December 2015, Worsley got a call from Jonathan Fluevog, a fellow engineer and the namesake of Vogville Recording. Located in Port Coquitlam, BC, about 30 km east of Vancouver, Vogville was a sought-after destination that welcomed the likes of Drake, Sarah McLachlan, and k-os through its doors during its 17 years of operation. Fluevog was looking to lease and possibly sell the studio, and presumably wanted to continue its legacy with someone ambitious, reliable, and talented at the helm.

After some due diligence and with plenty of encouragement from his wife, Alana, Worsley took over the renowned studio at 2250 Tyner in Port Coquitlam, bringing his fresh and finely tuned workflow to a large-scale commercial recording space.

Worsley's journey in the creative arts to this point has spanned over two decades. Having studied classical music at the post-secondary level, he spent much of his teen and early adult years writing, recording, and touring with a number of bands in the Pacific Northwest. One of those bands was B.C.-based Maplewood Lane, which Worsley joined on lead guitar ahead of the



PHOTO: MEAGHAN GIPPS

Echoplant Studio B control room

sessions for their album *Autumn on the Radio*. The band had booked space at a local studio, only to arrive and realize their rate didn't include an engineer. With no previous experience, Worsley felt the producer's chair beckoning and took a seat at the console. He was hooked.

While still playing with various outfits, he began honing his skills as a producer and engineer for his own projects and others. As his list of credits grew, so too did his home-based studio, which would eventually become Echoplant, and the complement of gear comprising it.

His work with acclaimed electronic rock duo Dear Rouge helped to push his profile to the national level. In addition to co-writing some cuts, Worsley performed on, produced, engineered, and mixed the band's debut LP, *Black to Gold*, which spawned several successful singles including the breakout hit "I Heard I Had" – the third-most played track on Canadian alternative radio in 2014 – and the stirring title track.



PHOTO: MEAGHAN GIPPS

Two-storey echo chamber with 1919 Heintzman upright



PHOTO: STEVEN SHEPHERD

Live room

In 2015, he won the award for Engineer of the Year and got a nod for Producer of the Year at the Western Canadian Music Awards. Since, he's worked with many among the current cohort of critically adored Canadian indie acts like Van Damsel, Basia Bulat, Emilie & Ogden, and Young Galaxy. Dear Rouge taking the prize for Breakthrough Group of the Year at the 2016 JUNO Awards was the icing on the metaphorical cake that was an incredibly successful couple of years. And in keeping with that metaphor, his takeover of Vogville in early 2016 was essentially the master chef moving into a bigger, better bakery.

"I've been working out of my home studio for 10 years," Worsley shares. "It was great and I loved working out of there. It was a pretty big space and had everything I needed. A ton of albums came out of that, but then I was approaching a point where I just needed something bigger."

The studio, which is now dubbed Echoplant Studio A, occupies a detached outbuilding on his property. In addition to constraints inherent in its size, it also lacked its own plumbing, meaning clients and collaborators had to use the washroom in the house. "Ten years of that, it was starting to get a bit old," Worsley says with a laugh.

The initial idea was to build a larger space on the property, though there were concerns about infringing on certain bylaws in the neighbourhood. "So it was perfect timing, because my wife was encouraging me to find another space, and I'm really glad she did, because I probably wouldn't have convinced myself I could push ahead and handle a larger commercial space. Right around the time we were having these discussions, I got the call from Jonathan and he asked if I wanted to move into Vogville."

In fact, he entirely credits his wife for where he currently finds himself, both figuratively and literally. "She's the reason I'm here," he stresses. "She's had confidence in me since the beginning, even when I didn't really have any confidence in myself." She's the one that convinced him he could make studio work his full-time job years ago, and she's also the one who later convinced him he could do it at Vogville.

Worsley wasn't a stranger to the space, having engineered sessions there in the past, but wanted to go in for a thorough look around with the perspective of a potential buyer. "Immediately, it felt like somewhere I could be comfortable," he recalls. It didn't take long for he and Fluevog to formalize the agreement.

Vogville, which is now Echoplant Studio B and less than 10 minutes by car from Studio A, was designed by the late John Vrtacic, who also devised the plans for major west coast music Meccas like Bryan Adams' Warehouse Studio and The Armoury Studios, built by Adams' longtime writing partner Jim Vallance and later the home base of the legendary Bruce Fairbairn.

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Among its trademarks are the two-storey echo chamber and, in it, a 1919 Heintzman upright piano that can be heard on countless Canadian chart-toppers of the past few decades.

There were also a few renovations and upgrades undertaken before Worsley formally took over. Those include a newly built two-bedroom suite with a kitchen and shower on the second floor and work in the studio proper that would maintain the overall character that made Vogville such a beacon for musicians while slightly tailoring it to his preferences.

"The main thing I focused on was the acoustic treatment in both the control room and live room," the engineer explains. He found the live room to be "just a bit boxy," elaborating: "I always felt like I had to baffle things off to get the sound I wanted in that room, so that was the first thing I tackled."

The solution was to tweak the treatments in the room so that the corners could handle absorption while three of the walls were adorned with skyline diffusers. Those tightened up the lower midrange and also brightened up the room, enabling Worsley to track drums without having to use baffles. "It's a dry room," he says, "but it sounds a lot tighter to me now."

While a few absorption panels here and diffusers there might sound fairly minimal as far as renos go, what's interesting is that Echoplant engineer Matt DiPomponio along with resident interns Shane Stephenson and Rory Sills took on the task of building the skyline diffusers themselves. "They're just so incredibly time intensive," Worsley says emphatically, not holding back the praise for his colleagues. "It took

so long – days upon days," he says, audibly cringing, "but in the end, we knew it was well worth the effort."

DiPomponio has been assisting Worsley for nearly five years. While Echoplant's owner takes a very hands-on approach to the majority of his projects, DiPomponio oversees set-ups and does a good amount of the in-the-box editing work. "He's absolutely amazing and I'm really lucky to have him with me at Studio B," Worsley says.

The wedge-shaped control room benefitted from the addition of a sizeable bass trap in the back corner to tighten up the sub-60 Hz frequencies. There were also a few baffles mounted to the ceiling to reduce some flutter echo on the left and right of the room.

As for Vogville's arguable crown jewel, its coveted two-storey echo chamber, the only changes there were aesthetic. The 1919 Heintzman piano is still the centerpiece, though the massive stained glass composition that reportedly dates back to 1914 and had long been resting on top of the piano was given a permanent home on the wall above the instrument. Together, they're an effective reminder to artists returning to the rebranded space that, while the engineer and gear may be different, this is nonetheless the same room that spawned a plethora of celebrated recordings.

One thing those returning clients might think is missing is a large-format console, considering Vogville's control room was anchored for over a decade by its 48-channel SSL 4040 E-G – one of the most sought-after consoles on the planet by many accounts. But Worsley has worked

without a large-format mixing console since beginning his career, and the change of scenery wasn't going to change a proven formula for success.

"I've gotten a few comments and sneers about not having a large console in the space, and what I'll say to that is that the majority of [today's engineers] don't use a large-format console to mix. They're using the channel strips if they sound good and the master section. A lot of them have a huge console and it acts as one big volume control. Or a laptop holder.

"Part of the reason I'm able to do this full time is making smart decisions about where the money is spent," Worsley says candidly, transitioning from the specific topic of the console to one of the guiding principles of his business model. "I have the plug-ins that I want and the processing power that I need; I know what I need to work, and anything else would really just mean I'd have to charge my clients more, and that's just not a smart trade-off for me."

That reveals another of his guiding principles: unending concern for his clients' best interests. While Echoplant is sure to attract new business based solely on its storied history and the reputation of its new owner, Worsley's focus has always been on developing talent – on going behind just setting up a microphone and hitting record and putting his fingerprints on various facets of their art and careers.

The Echoplant brand has so far been built atop those types of acts, essentially making Worsley something of a curator for promising talent from the scene in which he's engrained. "I've just always made a point to

seek out new music and musicians that I think have potential," he says.

When he reflects on some of the major successes of "team Echoplant" members, as his clientele has lovingly been dubbed – particularly those of artists like Dear Rouge and Van Damsel, who began their relationships with Worsley long before their profiles had reached the national level – he humbly says it "could be coincidence" that so many started their careers at the studio. Not likely.

"One of my main goals in working in this industry and working as a producer is to find new music that I think has potential and develop it," he says – from songwriting to production to shaping an overall sonic identity. "That's what I find the most rewarding."

Now operating out of two spaces, one of them featuring a second-floor living space reserved solely for use by clients, Worsley is better set than ever to cultivate talent. At Studio A, Worsley essentially reversed his layout and turned his previous tracking room into a mixing suite and the cozy control room was converted into an iso room for overdubs.

He recently had a staple of what's now Studio A, Dear Rouge, in at Studio B to work on the theme song for the upcoming Global television series *Private Eyes*, starring Jason Priestley. "We had an entire film crew plus the band plus all the TV executives here in the studio – I think a total of 17 people," he says. "It was tight, but I was thinking to myself, 'There's no way I would have been able to do this at my last space.'"

And so here he is, bringing a fresh attitude and workflow to a renowned room with a one-of-a-kind ambiance – a hybrid of new school and old school.

"There's a battle when you're working out of a home studio, and it's all about perception," he muses. "I often found myself having to ... justify being in a non-commercial space, though it certainly got easier after some of my work had been recognized. After that, I guess I stopped caring what people thought. There's a certain point where you just have to do what you do, and some people are going to love it and some people aren't."

At this point, those in the latter camp are few. Between its two spaces, bookings for Echoplant are presently coming in three or four months in advance, and what's more, it's all music-based. "I don't have to do anything outside of music to supplement my income. It's been that way for about six or seven years," Worsley says proudly. "I'm very lucky to be able to do that, and lucky to be able to do that from here." ★



Andrew King is the Editor of Professional Sound.



Ryan Worsley at work



House-built skyline diffusers

PHOTO: STEVEN SHEPHERD

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Lynx Aurora 16 Converters  
Spiral Groove Studio One Monitors  
Genelec 1030 Monitors  
Yamaha NS-10m Monitors  
Hafler Power Amps  
Bryston Power Amps

## OUTBOARD GEAR

Ampex Model 351 Preamp  
API 512a Mic Preamp  
Daking Pre/EQ (x2)  
Empirical Labs Distressor w/ Brit Mod (x2)  
Empirical Labs Fatso Jr. Analog Tape Simulator & Compressor  
UBK Fatso  
Mohog Mo76 Preamp  
Retro Instruments 176 Limiting Amplifier  
Drawmer 1969 Stereo Preamp Compressor  
Sebatron VMP-4000e 4-Channel Tube Preamp  
Chandler TG-2 Preamp  
Orban 111B Spring Reverb  
Roland Space Echo RE-201 (x2)  
Universal Audio LA-610  
Vintech 473 Preamp  
Vintech X73i Mic Preamp (x2)

## MICROPHONES

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Advanced Audio CM-54 Pencil Condenser (x3)  
Audix D6  
Beyerdynamic M-550 Omni  
Beyerdynamic m160 Ribbon (x2)  
Beyerdynamic M88 (x2)  
Beyerdynamic m-201  
CAD M179 (x3)  
Electro-Voice RE20  
Electro-Voice RE15  
Electro-Voice 635A (x2)  
Neumann KM184  
Neumann U87 (x2)  
Royer 121 Ribbon Mic (x4)  
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Pearlman TM-1 Tube Condenser  
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