

## **Fantasy Studios History**

Fantasy Records, along with its subsidiary Galaxy, was established in San Francisco in 1949 by Max and Sol Weiss, who originally got into the business by running a pressing plant. Their first artist was an Oakland pianist named Dave Brubeck, and when Brubeck's recordings began to sell, they went on to record Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker, and Cal Tjader, as well as Odetta, beat poets Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg and comic Lenny Bruce.

Saul Zaentz, who had joined Fantasy as a salesman in 1955, assembled a group of investors in 1967 and purchased the label from the Weiss brothers. They hit the jackpot the following year with Creedence Clearwater Revival. In an eighteen-month period, CCR scored no fewer than 20 Hot 100 singles and nine consecutive Top 10 singles in the US; they earned 21 RIAA-certified gold or platinum records with total sales of over 100 million worldwide.

The enormous success of Creedence Clearwater Revival enabled Fantasy to expand. In 1971 Fantasy relocated from Oakland to its current location in Berkeley and the original building, now referred to as the "annex" was only two-stories. In addition to a lobby area, the building included three recording studios, as well as a sauna, an exercise room and a lunchroom, which until 1981 was catered daily by Narsai's Restaurant in Kensington.

Each of the rooms served a specific purpose. In terms of recording space, Studio A sprawled to 28x48 feet, with two isolation booths and its own private lounge making it an ideal space for larger bands. Cannonball Adderley's "Big Man Opera" was recorded in A along with Woody Herman's "Herd." Studio A was also equipped with a projection booth, a pull-down screen and a portable mixing board that was built specifically to accommodate Fantasy's film unit. "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and "Apocalypse Now," among others, were mixed in A.

The mid-sized Studio B offered one isolation booth, which doubled as a lounge, making for an affordable overdub option. It was considered more intimate and used mostly for smaller acts and comedy records.

Studio C, another large space, featured a 24x37 foot main room, private lounge, bathroom and kitchenette. It was built for Creedence Clearwater Revival and is where the band recorded parts of Mardi Gras and Pendulum, as well the trio's "live" recording (CCR1). John Fogerty recorded "Blue Ridge Rangers" in C also and was in residence there until he left the label in 1974. Studio C was also the site of a film soundstage and Foley pits, which could also be used as music recording spaces.

Through the 1970s, Fantasy Studios operated as a private facility for artists recording under the umbrella of Fantasy Records and its many subsidiaries. In the early 70s, under the leadership of label president Ralph Kaffel, Fantasy purchased the catalogs of three of New York's top jazz independents: Prestige Records, Riverstone Records (established in 1953 by Bill Grauer and Orrin Keepnews) and Milestone Records, which Keepnews had started up in 1966 after the demise of Riverside. During the 70s, Keepnews joined Fantasy as a producer and helped build up a major jazz recording program at the company including Bill Evans, Sonny Rollins and Cannonball Adderley. In 1977 Fantasy went on to acquire the catalog of another legendary independent, the Memphis-based Stax Records (and affiliated labels Volt, Enterprise and Gospel Truth), which since 1960 had been producing contemporary soul masterpieces by artists like Isaac Hayes, Johnnie Taylor, the Dramatics, the Staple Singers and Albert King. The boost to the Fantasy catalog in the 1970s led to an extensive reissue program from the work of Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane and the Modern Jazz Quartet, among others.

Jim Stern, producer for the Sons of Champlin and Van Morrison, was chief engineer from 1974 until 1980. Jesse Osborn, who had been an engineer at Fantasy when it was based in Oakland and who had worked artists such as Baby Huey, was one of the early studio regulars along with Eddie Bill Harris and Don Cody. The traditional 70s method of getting into the studios was to start off working the in warehouse, graduate to tape transfers and then eventually move up to second engineer status. This was the path for Phil Kaffel, Wally Buck and Danny Koppelson among others. Throughout the 70s the studios acquired a growing cache of microphones and outboard gear making it the best collection of that kind of equipment outside of Los Angeles at the time.

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In 1980, Fantasy Studios expanded from three rooms to four rooms and opened its doors to outside clients for recording, mastering, and film scoring. The new studio D, designed by Tom Hidley and constructed by Sierra Audio, offered an automated Neve 8108 along with Hidley monitors and an assortment of Ampex 16 and 24 track recorders, a Studer 24-track, outboard gear, and a closet of more than 164 microphones.

Audio pioneer George Augsberger made several trips to the studio to suggest as how to get the best sound out of the rooms. The walls were built parallel as they had not been specifically designed by a sound engineer, but eventually bass traps and sound deadening was installed. Inspired by legendary Abbey Road Studios in London acoustic tile was also glued to the walls. However, it wasn't until Roy Segal took over the studios in 1981 that the rooms were redesigned and brought up to a more correct audio standard.

In 1982, the owners of Fantasy asked Roy Segal to head up the three-year-old Saul Zaentz Film Center, at which point he brought in Nina Bombardier to manage the studios. Nina acted as studio manager through 2007.

In the 90s Fantasy Studios was the place for everyone from Santana to Green Day record. It was here that Santana overdubbed a large portion of Supernatural. He also returned to Fantasy in 2001 to record parts of Shaman and again in 2005 for All That I Am.

Though the post-production mix stage known as the Saul Zaentz Film Center closed in January, 2005, Fantasy Studios continued to bring in steady post-production and ADR/Foley recording. It hosted post sessions for Jarhead, Cassanova, Art School Confidential, and Grizzly Man as well as voice over work from Pixar Studios, located only a couple of miles away in Emeryville.

In late 2004, Concord Records Inc. acquired Fantasy Inc., and the two labels merged to form Concord Music Group. Concord Music Group managed the studios through 2007, at which point the new owners of the Saul Zaentz Media Center, Wareham Properties bought the studios and took control in January of 2008.

In its 35-year history, Fantasy Studios has expanded both its external structure and internal contents. By keeping its original foundation intact, Fantasy has

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weathered the industry's highs and lows and stands in a position to remain strong in the years to come.