

How Al Schmitt would have done it?

ONE WEEK RECORDING AT STUDIO ROCINANTE, RIO DE JANEIRO

Who would have the idea to be taken to the hinterland of Rio de Janeiro at an altitude of a thousand meters, over an unpaved forest road by an unknown, only Portuguese-speaking Uber driver in an hour and a half drive to a place where a famous Brazilian studio is supposed to reside? At the arrival point, due to the onset of darkness, there was nothing to see except the starry sky and two shadowy silhouettes of houses! Ok, then I finally discovered the host Pepê and other friends who warmly welcomed me and escorted me to the guest house of Studio Rocinante. They paid for the Uber, I got a delicious Brazilian beer to welcome me and then a bed after the exhausting journey. So it wasn't a hijack! Then in daylight the next morning I explored the small clearing with two houses built into the hillside in front of a mountain, one the Studio Rocinante, the other the associated guest house, surrounded by dense forest and with a rushing waterfall nearby. I had arrived!

HISTORY

In September 2019, I met with a number of motivated audio engineers at Studio LaFabrique, Saint Rémy, and we had a great 'mix with the masters' workshop with Al Schmitt and Steve Genewick - sadly the last workshop Al led. Since that time, a friendship has developed in the group, with weekly zoom meetings and various activities. The group gave itself the name More67s in reference to Al Schmitt's fondness for the Neumann U67. After the death of Al Schmitt in April 2021, the idea grew to organize a meeting within the group to experience a week of recording and mixing in memory of the old master. After some planning and research, Pepê (Pedro Monnerat) made the suggestion to us to use his studio in Brazil, stay in the associated. And that's why eight sound engineers and audio professionals, including yours truly, met at this remote location in the jungle.

THE STUDIO ROCINANTE

The two founders of the studio and the record label Rocinante, Sylvio Fraga and Pedro (Pepê) Monnerat, live and love Brazilian music, jazz, the origins, the young and old musicians. You can feel that! And after one or two days, when you get into the mood of the remote place, you can hear around you the rhythms and grooves of the many productions that have already taken place (see also: <https://www.instagram.com/rocinantegravadora/> and <https://rocinante.com.br/en/>). For the name of the studio 'Rocinante' the two founders took reference to the characteristics of the horse from the Don Quixote book: not a racehorse, but a 'workhorse' (from the Spanish), of simple origin, brave, loyal and reliable. The studio house is built on two levels into the hillside and the cliffs of the mountain. On the first floor is the large control room with a Neve VR60 console and two pairs of ATC monitors, and in the basement are the recording rooms, which are reached either by a small spiral staircase or by an outside entrance. All rooms have daylight and a view of the greenery. Around the central, spacious, very high recording room, in which also large ensembles are recorded, there are four other, smaller recording rooms in a semicircle, which are soundproofed, well separated from each other, but with large windows, that support the joint recording of bands and ensembles. I have never seen it in this open, airy form in any studio before. This ambience gives the studio something unique, it breathes in the surroundings and inspires during the recordings. The control room is also very large and has other adjoining rooms, such as the machine room, a room with a keyboard collection and another room with two Otari MTR 90 tape machines. In total, there are still four working 2-inch tape machines here in the studio (another Studer A800 and an Otari MX80). The two MTR 90s are the 'workhorses', as they are often used to realize productions with 48 tracks. Besides the old Neve VR60 console, there is a very large collection of mostly analog outboard, which we also use extensively for our recordings during the week. The Neve VR60 comes from the famous English Rockfield studios, where it was used until the 80s (Ozzy Osbourne, Queen,...). In Brazil, the console was completely reworked before coming to Rocinante equipped with Flying Faders automation. And right in front of the studio door, which always has to be closed because of the giant spiders and the high humidity, there is a large sitting area for drinking coffee or cachaça and relaxing your ears with the sounds of the waterfall, the insects and the birds. A studio in the middle of Brazilian nature. The two houses are the only ones up on the mountainside, that have running water and electricity. Speaking of electricity: we had a heavy thunderstorm and the

power went out everywhere, for almost ten hours! Everywhere? No, everything was in the dark, only the studio continued to run undeterred by a 30KW diesel generator about fifty meters from the house.

Projects, record label and vinyl production by Rocinante

The studio Rocinante is almost always booked out. the projects are with well-known Brazilian musicians and artists and are increasingly linked to the own Rocinante record label, which in turn has productions pressed as vinyl in editions of 1000 in its own vinyl production facility, which was set up in summer of 2021 (see website link: <https://rocinante.com.br/en/catalogue/>). I find the business model very interesting and promising, but it also works because the record trade is directly involved. i was wondering - typically for Germans - what the work processes of the entire production chain are like. How does it work? After the final mix of the production, the data is transferred to Berlin to the company Schnittstelle for mastering and the subsequent vinyl cut on a modified Neumann cutting system. After each step of work, quality control is carried out by Rocinante. The vinyl lacquers are then sent to a dutch company for the creation of the stamper, the metal pressing mold, which then sends the product to the Rocinante vinyl factory. This entire process takes a maximum of two to three weeks, from the finished mix to the arrival of the metal mold for pressing in Brazil. That really impressed me, especially since we also visited the production facility and i could actually understand the process on site.

The motivation of Pepê and his team: "to use optimal partners and technologies, that are only partially available in Brazil and then to produce them themselves at significantly lower costs with high quality and environmentally compatible production through in-house developments". Sounds convincing!

The musicians and the recordings

Pepe had invited the band of Luana Mallet, a well-known Brazilian singer, for our recording week. The core line-up was vocals, drums, double bass, guitar, piano and trumpet/flugelhorn. this line-up was supplemented by a string quartet (two violins, viola and cello) and additional wind instruments (saxophone and trombone). This line-up gave us enough room to realize the idea of recording and mixing in the style of Al Schmitt. The goal was to record six (!) tracks including overdubs with the musicians on three days and to mix one track on the fourth day.

But before the implementation comes the planning, and that was not easy, because eight audio professionals (can) have different ideas about the setup, and the miking was of course not fed from the cornucopia of a Capitol studio. What was available had to be used. and the topic of using the input channels of the Neve console and/or the outboard also had to be discussed. more than once on that day before the musicians arrived, we asked ourselves the question: How would Al have done that? We came to an agreement.

The planning of the recordings, the basic setup of the channel/outboard usage, the microphone selection and the adjustment of the pro tools template were done the day before the musicians arrived. it was helpful that five of the eight audio professionals in the group have to perform these tasks almost every day in their professional lives. And the collaboration on demand worked out fantastically. this meant that one of the workshop goals was fulfilled early! My personal role in the preparation process, during the recordings and the mixing can essentially be described as 'quality assurance'. Critical listening and asking questions, pointing out musical-technical aspects of the recording in dialog with the audio engineers and the musicians, i.e. more of a producer-orientated activity. In addition, I was responsible for documenting our workshop with photos and video recordings and then summarizing them in video documentaries.

Recording began on Tuesday, April 26. On the one hand the arrival of the musicians, on the other the anniversary of the death of Al Schmitt, who has remained in deep memory as our mentor and friend.

For me, the set-up, the rehearsals and the arrangements with the musicians went surprisingly fast. I was used to that from my own studio projects. communication worked well, mostly in english, or the Brazilians spoke among themselves and Pepê or Felipe, the studio assistant (actually, the title is already insulting, he was a full-fledged, indispensable member of our work right from the start!) We 'foreign guests' quickly realized, that we were working with highly professional musicians, who actively and effectively supported the studio workflow. On the very first day of recording we had the first song done in within three takes. Musically Luana and her musicians were extremely well prepared and we quickly realized that they were full-blooded professionals in their respective fields. Over the days, we developed a working logic, that allowed each member of the group to control the recording on the console or on the pro tools computer, and to make arrangements with the musicians via the talkback microphone (remember: one floor down! the musicians had visual contact with each other. the control room was only accessible via talkback). If necessary, one of us went downstairs to check or adjust microphone positions. by late evening on

the third day of recording, all six tracks, including overdubs, were finished. it was a tough schedule, but the international collaboration proved successful.

The Mixing

The time limit for our workshop week required prioritization, so on the last day of the studio work eight recording and mixing professionals mixed a song without the musicians. Sounds impossible, but it worked by creating three versions with slightly different approaches by the respective mixers. We all did intensive listening rounds together, coordinated adjustments and corrections, and in the end one version was approved together as the final one. Of course this amount of time is not justifiable in everyday production. according to my estimation, mixing by one of the qualified sound engineers would have been completed in a maximum of four hours (for the first song). So we worked together for almost ten hours, including a lunch break. Of course, the existing outboard was also used intensively during the mixing process. For example - as Al Schmitt also favored - the Summit Audio TLA-100a compressor, the Martech MSS10 preamplifier or for the reverberation the Bricasti M7 with 'clear reverb setting. Al Schmitt's approach to control different reverberation rooms in Capitol studio with seven or eight AUX paths on the console was of course not possible to recreate in full analog, but with the help of supplementary plug-ins we were able to implement it in his style. The UAD Capitol Chambers played an important role for the vocals, and as Steve Genewick had recommended, always use Room 4 without changing the plug-in setting. In addition to individual UAD plug-ins, we also used plug-ins from PSPaudioware (PSP infinity channel for drums and the PSP2445 EMT for reverb), on the one hand because the plug-ins impressed us all with their sound and low noise level, and on the other hand because of their low CPU-Usage. And secondly because Adam, one of the developers, is also a member of our group. A few days later, Pepê and I were able to present Luana (vocals) and Arimatéo (trumpet/ flugelhorn) the first mixed song in the Studio. Satisfaction would be an understatement; great joy and enthusiasm on the part of the artists would be a better description. Another goal of the joint adventure Brazil achieved!

A week after my friends from More67s left, I was still with Pepê at the Rocinante.

I spontaneously changed my flight and wanted to take part in the mixing of a production with four jazz musicians, which turned out to be just as great an experience. From the sofa in the control room I was good at making comments and suggestions for changes! But there was also a small, memorable event on one evening. I call it 'international mixing'. Arne, already back in his studio in Berlin, and Pepê in studio Rocinante mixed another song by Luana Mallet together. Based on a rough mix, the two worked live with Zoom (picture and sound of the colleagues) and Audiomovers (stereo stream of the mix with 96/24) on the final mix in Pro Tools.

This experience was very exciting and showed me, that our thoughts on intensifying international cooperation are promising: another goal of the workshop achieved and proven in practice.

Summary and international collaboration

The More67s trip to studio Rocinante in Brazil was successful and also very emotional: a reunion with friends from the professional audio business, whom I had only seen at the Zoom meetings for over two years, the revival of many memories of the great workshop with Al Schmitt and Steve Genewick, the professional realization of a studio production with excellent musicians, the joint testing of international cooperation, but also the intensive exchange of experience. All this makes this trip unique and unforgettable. But also the joint boat trip along the coast of Rio de Janeiro with a BBQ on the boat, the music listening evenings with caipirinha, whiskey and cigars and the delicious meals in the kitchen of the Rocinante guesthouse were all part of the overall emotional package. I learned, that working together on recording and mixing projects enriches and broadens the horizon, but also works independently of the location. So in the future, if I need a very good, but also affordable trumpet player in a production, I can also have him recorded 'remotely' at Pepê's site. If I want to mix a project, but want to rely on the experience of the colleagues, I can integrate them remotely.

I was also very impressed by the workflow from the final mix to the vinyl production, which also showed that the cross-continental use of qualitative resources works and that there are no obstacles to be feared in the process. The atmosphere and the mood in studio Rocinante was very special, the people there warm and friendly. We will do it again.

Separate block I: The Musicians

Luana Mallet and her musicians are well-known Brazilian professionals, who in this, but also in many other formations, make predominantly Brazilian jazz, world and pop music. The roots of Bossanova and Samba are unmistakable, but also various jazz styles and solo approaches can be found with these excellent musicians. Two special, familiar relationships were represented in our project: the father of Luana, Glauco Fernandes, plays the violin and created the strings arrangements. The trumpeter José Arimatéa is Luana's husband. Both influence Luana's compositions very intensively. I found the professionalism in terms of instrumental skills and concentrated realization under studio conditions very impressive.

The band

- José Arimatéa - trumpet and flugelhorn
- Luiz Otávio - acoustic and electric piano on all tracks; music arrangement for 'Tudo Bem' and 'Once upon a time'
- Humberto Mirabelli - acoustic and electric guitar
- Jefferson Lescowich - double bass and electric bass
- Erivelton Silva - drums on 'Olha Ali' and 'Once upon a time'
- Mac William Caetano - drums on 'Beijo Leve', 'Paraíso', 'Stars' and 'Tudo Bem'

The strings

- Glauco Fernandes - violin and strings arrangements
- Fernando Matta - violin
- Bernardo Fantini - viola
- Iura Ranevsky - cello

The wind players

- Julio Merlino - flute, tenor saxophone and horn arrangements
- José Arimatéa - trumpet and flugelhorn
- Marlon Sette - trombone

Separate block II: Microphoning and outboard

The goal of the recordings was to capture the acoustics of the recording rooms, the outstanding musicality of the singer and the instrumentalists through appropriate microphone setup and required outboard, using the methods and approaches of our mentor and friend Al Schmitt. Besides the Neumann U67, the Martech MSS10, the Studer D19, the Mastering Lab ML1 as well as the Summit TLA100 were Al Schmitt's favorites.

Our setup in excerpt:

Vocals/Instruments	<i>Microphones</i>	<i>Outboard</i>
Vocals	Neumann U67	Martech MSS10 in Summit TLA100
	AKG 414 (comparison)	
	AEA R84 (comparison)	

Double bass	Telefunken AK47	Studer D19 Preamp in Distressor im Opto-Modus
	Neumann M147	like before
Trumpet/Flugelhorn	Neumann U67	Mastering Lab ML1 preamp
	Royer 121	Neve 1073

All other inputs were either patched via Neve 1073 and then into the Neve VR60 console or directly into the console.

Grand Piano	2 x COLES 4038	Neve 1073
	2 x Neumann KM 184	Neve 1073 (Room)
Guitars	2 x AKG 414 Blümlein	
	Mojave MA100	
	Royer 121 (guitar amp)	
Strings		
1st and 2nd Violin	Neumann U67	
Viola	Telefunken AK47	
Cello	Neumann M147	
Room	2 x Neumann KM184	
Drums (excerpt)		
Bass Drum	AKG D12vr	
HiHat	AKG 451	
Snare (top)	AKG 451	
Snare (bottom)	Shure SM572	
Overheads	2 x Audio Technica 5045	

Separate block III: The author

André Maletz, born in 1957, is a media educator and worked in this profession from 1979 to 1989, mainly in youth education, with music and media projects. In 1990, the IT and Consulting industry called and he worked as a consultant for companies such as Motorola, T-Systems and other consulting firms until 2000. From 2000 onwards, he became self-employed as a business consultant and project manager for large IT and organization projects. Music came too short in the long and intensive professional/consulting years, but allowed him financially to enter as a partner in a distressed, small studio in Cologne in 2010 and 2014 in the joint project Krässemaschine, the construction of a 12-channel tube console with Holger Claßen (see also issue 3/2015 of the studio magazine). The adventure studio partnership ended quickly and unsuccessfully, so he set up a professional hybrid mixing suite called mixing ambulance in 2014, which - how could it be otherwise - got the acoustic implementation of Fritz Fey. The intensification of the know-how through many partnerships, the exchange in the audio professional world, e.g. by activities at the AES, and participation in several 'mix with the master workshops' (2013 Michael Brauer, 2017 Andy Wallace, 2019 al Schmitt & Steve Genewick) were accompanying activities that now culminated in the joint work at Rocinante Studio.

Separate block IV: More67s - The Group

This group of international sound engineers and audio professionals came into being after a joint 'mix with the masters' workshop in 2019 with Al Schmitt and Steve Genewick. To this day, the different experiences are exchanged in weekly Zoom meetings, joint, internal mixing contests are carried out, the results are evaluated together, and new technologies, plug-ins and workflows are discussed. Relevant knowledge is documented in a private online forum and extensive data is stored in a dropbox account, a common approach to knowledge management in the pro audio field. The joint recording and mixing workshop in Brazil was the first reunion in the real world after two and a half years and was themed 'How would Al Schmitt have done that?' in memory of our deceased mentor and friend.

The participants

- Pedro Paulo Monnerat, Brazil, our host!
- Arne Schumann, Germany
- Adam Taborowski, Poland/Sweden
- David Bjur, USA
- Sivert Hendriksen, Norway
- Josué Pasqual, Spain
- David Miles Huber, USA
- André Maletz, Germany

Undertitles of pictures:

The Rocinante guest house at 1000m above sea level

View on Neve VR60 with David Bjur

Outboard with some of Al Schmitt's favorite tools

Neve VR60 and ATC monitors in natural environment

Arne (Schumann) doing the recording settings

The Vinyl production of Rocinante with German technology

Microphone setup and rehearsal with the strings

Setup for trumpet and flugelhorn with Neumann U67 and Royer 121

Luana Mallet with Neumann U67

Preparations in ProTools by Arne Schumann and Felipe Duriez

Musicians and audio engineers talking about the recordings

Sivert Hendriksen and Felipe Duriez recording concentrated

Luana Mallet with her string quartet and the More67s

Josué Pasqual in mixing session

André Maletz during drum-recording