

Recording the music



Recording an LP for Marantz must mean that the results are undisputable. Ken Ishiwata is known for being highly critical when it gets to sound quality. Having Aalt Jouk van den Hul controlling your laquers made from a digital(!) recording - and nodding to the result is also something very special. The dutch audiophile record label NTS Digital is used to work upon the highest quality standards. Simply because it's the only way to survive in a tough market. The recordings are exported worldwide. Norbert Lehmann (**Lehmannaudio**) interviews Fritz de With, audio engineer and owner of STS Digital.

NL: When did you make your decision to become an audio engineer and how long did it take until you founded STS digital?

FdW: When I was 15 years old I recorded many live music on a simple Philips recorder with two Sennheiser MD 421 microphones for a hospital radio. Then in 1972, 22 years later, I founded STS.

NL: You give special attention to teamwork within your company.

FdW: Yes, I'm not working as a one band show. I really like to have more trained ears around during a production, so you can have a professional discussion about the sound and quality achievement. It helps us to get the best results.

NL: Having the expression digital in your company name how important are LPs for you?

FdW: In 1972 we started to produce a number of recordings; we used the SABA 600 SH with on board four channel microphone mixing panel. From the master tape we pressed LP's at Philips. Right now LPs are about 20% of our total sales.

NL: You have many contacts with the consumer hifi scene. I saw pictures of Mr. van den Hul judging your laquers and Mr. Wirth from Acoustic solid also had you produce an LP for his company.

FdW: I appreciate the opinion from A.J. van den Hul, he is an expert in making cartridges and has good ears to judge if a record is good enough. I also like a close co-operation with high end hardware companies like Acoustic Solid, Marantz and of course Lehmann audio, just to get up with the latest developments.

NL: How long does it normally take until STS Digital productions are ready for being mastered?

FdW: From start to finish, a recording and the end product take about two months. Quality products need time!

NL: You made a recording (an LP!) for Marantz. Ken Ishiwata is said to be very demanding as far as sound quality is concerned. How did this production happen and were did it take place?

FdW: I know Ken from 1992 which was the year that we started or coope-

ration with Marantz. Together we made the first ever Dolby Prologic surround CD. Oh yes, Ken is very demanding about the sound quality but despite our company name the Marantz LP was recorded analogue and not digitally, because we like the sound of the sixties. In the end Ken liked the sound of the album Sound Design One better and Sound Design two even more, because of the fast attack and because the overall frequency is better. That made us decide to record LP albums only digitally and master it in copper (Direct Metal Mastering).

NL: What are your most important guidelines during the recording process?

FdW: As an audio engineer I always look for five keypoints and disciplines in master recordings:

1. The warm sound, that acoustic instruments possess on their own, but is often not captured by sound-technicians. We attach a great deal of value to the warm sound and try to get this through carbon-fibre and quality microphones, plus an AD-converter.
2. The acoustic placing and recognition of the musicians in the recording

space, feasible with the STS-3 and the STS-6 recording system. For us, the horizontal and vertical resolution in a recording are very important.

3. The phase purity of a recording, both the electric phase (good cable/fibre connections etc), and the acoustic phase must be acquired through proper placing of the microphones. This can be checked by a set of headphones, and of course a phase meter.

4. The symmetry in the recording; this means always placing the microphones in such a way that on both the left and the right side there's an equal division of signal, and not placing mono support microphones on the extreme left and right. These will disturb the symmetrical sound and will give sound-peaks that do not coincide with the total acoustics of the space.

5. Transparency and clarity in a recording. This does not mean an overly sharp recording, but one of softness in tone and clarity, in which especially the 3-dimensional recording-space is being displayed.

NL: *You have some well equipped reference listening rooms with mouth watering power amp / loudspeaker combinations. How important is*

headphone monitoring for you during the recording process and later on?

FdW: When I start a recording, I always start to listen with headphones. I like to know if microphone placing is correct and if reverb is not doing something strange. The



Fritz de With, audio engineer and owner of STS Digital

headphones and of course a very good headphone amplifier will give you the sound of the recording locations, very precisely. Loudspeakers will give you the sound of the recording location plus the room where the recording equipment and loudspeakers are placed. So I say the headphone gives you the first ambiance,

with loudspeakers they add a second ambiance to the recordings and that is why you need a good headphone to judge how much ambiance is wanted in a recording.

How did it come that you hold workshops in Holland?

FdW: I give many workshops in Holland because this brings me in direct contact with all kinds of people in the High End scene again I like to experience what they think and like to hear in recordings what kind of music, what kind of artist they want. Last but not least it is the cheapest marketing I know of and also very pleasant to do ■

STS Digital equipment list:

Microphones: CAD E 300 and Schoeps CMC6/ MK2H-MK2
Cable/fibre: Siltech HF-9-G3
Interlinks for digital and analogue: Siltech XLR-G7
Recorder: Sound Devices
Multitrack: Tascam DA78-HR
Mixer: Soundcraft LM1
A./D converter: Weiss
Speakers: Kharma Ceramique-Ce 2.2
Amplifier: Marantz PM 14
CD-player: Marantz SACD SA-1
CD-R: Emtec
Headphone: Philips HP 890
Headphone monitoring: Lehmann audio Black Cube Linear
Turntable: Acoustic Solid
Phono stage: Lehmann audio Black Cube SE

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„Phase purity and transparant sound are essential in our recordings - and in the monitoring too.“

Fritz de With, STS Digital



The sound engineers at one of Netherland's major audiophile record labels use the Black Cube Linear for critical headphone monitoring. Hear why.

Lehmannaudio

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