

RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE: THE US AND LATIN AMERICAN MARKETS

One could say that if anyone is embedded in business of Latin Music Production, it is Angel Fernandez. From his New York City borough, Fernandez writes, records, produces, and scores music on a wide range of Latin music projects, including the Grammy-winning album by Spanish Harlem Orchestra. But for well over a decade, he has also directed and performed with Marc Anthony's live band, too.



Angel Fernandez

travel, live performance, and studio work are nearly weekly endeavors for him.

To Fernandez, the growing international appeal of Latin-tinged music is only natural. After all, American music production has long produced an aural amalgamation comprised in large part of Latin-influenced sounds. "Even without knowing it, American music has had influences from Brazil and the Caribbean for a long time," he explains.

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| PERSPECTIVES ON OPERATING AN INTERNATIONAL STUDIO DESIGN ORGANIZATION

In the early 1970s, the idea of running an international design and architecture firm was the furthest thing from my mind. Today, with offices in New York, San Francisco, Switzerland, Argentina, Brazil, and — hopefully by the time this article appears — Mexico City, I am both comfortable with and grateful to have a worldwide network of talented and dedicated peers at my back.

My initial foray into internationalism came about in 1994 when my partner Beth Walters and I attended a trade show in Buenos Aires. We met Sergio Molho, a young studio owner interested in building a new facility. Within minutes we realized our lives had crossed paths forever and we had a representative in Buenos Aires. Two years later we had a design/build organization in Argentina.

Almost at the same time, two interns worked at our USA office in Highland, New York. I have always been a believer in the apprenticeship concept (fancy word for interns) and have developed a regular source of great students via my teaching efforts. The two remarkable interns were Dirk Noy from Switzerland and Renato Cipriano from Brazil. Like Sergio, we almost instantly became lifetime friends and business partners, and they both wanted to return to their native countries. This left Beth and me little choice but to open offices with them. Almost instantly we were an international design firm.

Our three satellite offices (Argentina, Brazil, and Switzerland) have migrated from local-centric organizations to a fully integrated organization. Over 50 percent of our projects are now full collaborations with each office contributing its special set of skills. Our offshore offices have generated a number of extremely exciting international projects.

A good reputation takes thirty years to build. We've been extremely selective in choosing international associates who are technically and intellectually aligned with our business and creative philosophy. We've also been fortunate to have selected a particularly advantageous time to be in business. Breakthrough innovations in computer and communications technology have impacted dramatically in our ability to turn drawings and plans around and to share changes with clients and staff instantly. As an international firm, we are multilingual with about six different languages regularly appearing on drawings, both in English and Metric. The language of professional audio seems to be English, but the language of construction varies from land to land.

Working internationally provides us with an incredible opportunity to see the world and make meaningful contributions to bringing disparate cultures closer together through music and broadcast production. We live and work in the most exciting and productive time in history.

by John Storyk, co-principal, Walters-Storyk Design Group

"Its continued acceptance and growth is a combination of the fact that there's more money to be made in that music because of its international appeal, and, luckily, to have a nice, competitive studio, you don't have to spend a million dollars anymore. In South America and the Caribbean, there are a lot more studios now, and a lot more engineers. I guess you can call it outsourcing, but in reality, it's a lot more cost-effective to record in Mexico or Argentina than it is in the US, and you still get something of very high quality."

Meanwhile, engineer José "Hyde" Cotto operates primarily out of San Juan, Puerto Rico, but often works in the active Latin music scene in Miami. Most notably, Cotto acted as an engineer on Daddy Yankee's hit



José 'Hyde' Cotto showing his bona fides.

"Gasolina," a Reggaetón smash single just as appealing on dance floors in Europe and Asia as in clubs throughout the Americas. From Cotto's perspective, the expanding reach of hot, new Latin hits has prompted

more collaboration between established American artists and those previously known only in the traditional Latin markets. Nowhere, he insists, is this as clearly apparent as with the appeal of Reggaetón.

"Right now, there's a lot of things happening for us," Cotto says humbly in regards to hip-hop newfound love for Latin music beats, flavors, and voices. "When we first started to do this Reggaetón thing, we were looking to you guys [the US market]. We were hip-hop fans, which is a main influence in Reggaetón; it's Jamaican Dancehall and American Hip-Hop, and we added our Latin flavor to it. That's how Reggaetón came out. Then, all of a sudden, we got all this attention. We find out that all these American guys, who we are fans of, are trying to get our sound. I feel flattered."

As a result of "all this attention," a world-class, massive workspace - built specifically for the hottest Reggaetón acts in the world - is currently in the works for Miami. Producer Francisco "Luny Tunes" Saldania - an associate of Cotto and a prime mover behind the success of Daddy Yankee - has commissioned Molho to coordinate the construction of a brand new, WSDG-designed, nine-studio recording/mastering complex totalling over 12,000 square feet in size.

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| RAFAEL: RECORDING IN BRAZIL

The Brazilian recording studio scene may be geographically close (and regularly associated with) the Latin recording industry, but its difference of language (Portuguese), style, and tastes make it a unique music market all its own. André Rafael — owner of São Paulo, Brazil's AR Studios — explains.

On the market: "The Brazilian recording market is really unique; there are lots of examples. The record companies are complaining that they're not selling so many records, but in north/northeast Brazil, there are some 'Forró' bands that sell more than 300,000 copies every year! And they're all independents. It happens the same in the south, too. Some traditional bands (regional music) sell more than 100,000 copies every year. Another example is that there are few Latin artists that make good work in Brazil; we are very closed to the music that is in Spanish. (I don't know why!)"



Studio designer John Storyk

BUILDING PERFECTION SOUTH OF THE BORDER

Sergio Molho, who heads Walters-Storyk Design Group's Latin office in Argentina, is quick to offer that the best studios in the Caribbean and Central and South America will easily rival the most favorite digs of any jaded American engineer, mixer, and/or producer. "The owners of these facilities wanted to have a state-of-the-art infrastructure, architecture, design, and equipment," he tells of the most prominent Latin super studios.



"There is no difference between our studios in Latin America and those in American cities that you currently visit and record at in the US. They are equal."

If there are any differences, Molho explains, it benefits the client via a vast array of available acoustic instruments. "Since you will find Latin music generally involves a lot of acoustic instrument recording, most of these studios have a huge portfolio of acoustic instruments: percussion, pianos, and

lots of other musical equipment on board."

This is also the case with recording gear, as a rental-dependent studio in Latin America would operate at a disadvantage. "With the way that works here in Latin America, there is no company that rents out-board gear," says Molho. "In other words, it is very difficult to rent ten Avalon mic pre-amps from Tuesday to Wednesday; they need to have all the stuff."

So, yes — you can expect the latest Pro Tools|HD rig and world-class desks and gear at most top-notch Latin recording digs. Most of the gear criteria for the latest and greatest Latin American studios "comes from New York or LA," reveals Molho. "If you look for a rider for those studios, you see more or less the same toys. It's very common to find a lot of RCA and Telefunken refurbished and working. That's a common thing to find here — the latest version of Pro Tools|HD and the oldest fine microphones."



Two rooms at Circo Beat in Buenos Aires - a piano studio and control room.

GO FOR THE DEAL AND DIGS, STAY FOR THE MUSICIANS

Both Fernandez and Molho agree: those who travel to Latin American studio destinations may go for the great escape, deal, and digs, but they will surely stay — as well as return — for the wonderful studio musicians they find when looking for just the right sound. "There's a lot of great musicians down there," Fernandez offers knowingly. "They've obviously been listening to salsa and Latin jazz for so long that it's a part of them. If you're doing a bolero, which is a more traditional, slow-type of thing, they've been doing that

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thing in South America forever and can do a great job, both on a recording and musician-ship level."

Molho echoes that sentiment. "Okay, let's say that I'm a producer and it's not important where in the world I work," he begins. "I need to record a salsa combo. Will I do it in New York or should I go to Colombia? Ha! No doubt the best choice is

Colombia. The same goes for recording a samba; there is no doubt that I should contact a studio in Rio or São Paulo and get the real samba with the guitar players and conga guys with the real flavor. The instruments will be perfect. The tune will be perfect."

But because of the evolution of Latin music, American soil may still be your best

bet for the most appropriate musicians, reasons Fernandez. "A lot of it depends on the type of thing that you're doing. If you're looking for a Spanish Harlem sound, you'll be hard-pressed to get it somewhere other than New York."

In summation, Molho insists that the proof is in the pudding. "I can tell you that you can find first class engineers here recording Grammy Award-winning, multi-million worldwide sellers in the same class of facilities you would find in the US," he attests. "They could be anywhere... and they are here."

Strother Bullins is the Reviews and Features Editor for Pro Audio Review.

| FOUR LATIN STUDIO HOTSPOTS

Sergio Molho of WSDG describes his a few of his firm's Latin American design/build studio successes.

Circo Beat in Buenos Aires, Argentina: "It is the recording studio of one of the top and hippest Argentinean/Latin composers, Fito Páez. He has the first large-sized recording studio designed and built by WSDG here in Latin America, which is based here in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It's the private studio of Fito, but it is also a commercial studio. It's the home base of larger productions in Argentina and artists from all over Latin America come to record here."

AR Studios in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: "It's the most important studio in Brazil, no doubt about it. It is the studio reference of the recording industry there."

Swing Musica in Buenos Aires, Argentina: "It's a private complex with four studios and the most important studio for music for advertisement and film in Latin America. They actually work worldwide from Buenos Aires. You can hear the music that Swing producers make in commercials all over Latin America, the United States, and Europe; they work for the Hispanic market in the US, too. Now that most of the advertising campaigns are global, they make much of the music for them and it is used all over the world."

Non-Stop in Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Mexico City: "They are one of the main companies that do dubbing for the big cable companies like Warner, Sony, and Disney. They translate and dub dialogue for daily Latin American content."