

New York State of Recording

New York drummer Billy Ward (www.billyward.com) has played with such notable artists as Joan Osborne, Carly Simon, Robbie Robertson, Bill Evans and B.B. King, and is no stranger to affordable portable production. Ward recorded his own CDs, *Two Hands Clapping* and *Out the Door*, using a minimal rig, and recently created two new audio and video collections from the Billy Ward Trio for release on the Web. The trio comprises Ward, L.A. guitarist/composer Barry Coates and Boston bass player Bill Urmson; all three gathered at Ward's lake house in upstate New York for rehearsals in preparation for a live gig at Manhattan's Cutting Room.



"We met at the house and for a couple hours each day we played in the living room," says Ward about the rehearsals. "We just set up a pair of Schoeps CMC 41 mics through Chandler TG2 preamps through an Apogee Duet into Logic on a laptop." The band had no inkling that their rehearsal tracks would ever go public, but the results were so good that Ward decided to release them on his Website in a "pay what you want" format. "The house has wooden floors with bare walls, save for artwork, so it is not a room designed to sound good. I just want to acknowledge that sometimes the music can overtake obstacles."

Following the rehearsals, the trio performed and recorded at the Cutting Room. A four-camera, two-person video crew captured the event live, along with Robert L. Smith from Defy Recordings, who recorded to Pro Tools. The audio setup at the club was small, using four mics — two Schoeps CMC 41s and two modified large-diaphragm Oktava mics — into Chandler TG2 and API preamps, then ported into the computer using an Edirol interface. The Oktavas were placed close to the stage in a coincident pair facing the band, while the Schoeps CMC 41 hypercardioid mics were in the back of the room in another stereo pair facing the stage. Ward also employed the venue's live sound engineer, who recorded his stage mic feeds onto two tracks for added coverage, giving him a total of three stereo feeds.

After the gig, Ward sweetened and prepared the recorded tracks for download back at his home studio. "I laid all six of the tracks into Pro Tools and each one had some qualities," says Ward. "The Schoeps, even though they were 40 feet from the stage, had such a sweet top end, yet there was way too much detail in audio noise." Ward started the mix with the closer-placed Oktavas, then added the Schoeps to the mix only after using a low-cut filter set at a relatively high frequency. "I used this to get the icing on the sonic cake and carefully blended it in." Ward also added some low frequencies to the Oktavas, experimenting with various scenarios using Daking EQs. He also brought up some of the quieter passages in the mix. "You still hear the [band's] dynamics, but it's not like the floor falls out," he comments. He then handed off the audio to video editor Neil Miller, who edited and synched the video and audio tracks for the final release.