

Michael Croiter



(Even by the standards of this industry, Michael Croiter is a pretty busy guy. A drummer on the Broadway production of *Avenue Q*, he also records and mixes the original music for the Disney Channel series *Johnny and the Sprites*, starring former *Avenue Q* leading man John Tartaglia. And he's recently finished converting a former beauty shop on New York's East 5th Street into Yellow Sound Lab, with the expert help of architect/acoustician John Storyk, of Walters-Storyk Design Group; in addition, he's outfitted the facility with new gear from Dave Malekpour of Professional Audio Design. The process was hectic, to say the least; Croiter was hired for *Johnny and the Sprites* and had six months to turn the building's former coal bin into Yellow Sound Lab.)

LSA: How did the studio happen?

MC: For the last few years, I've been editing and mixing at my apartment on 58th Street. I did the *Johnny and the Sprites* pilots there. After the short pilots aired on the Disney Channel, they ordered 26 full-length episodes, and I thought it was the right time to go from an editing suite in an apartment to a full-service recording studio.

LSA: How did you find this place?

MC: I saw three dozen places, all over the city. I saw fantastic spaces in Williamsburg—but I knew that Disney and my other clients would not want to go anywhere other than Manhattan. I found this place and brought in John Storyk. He was apprehensive at first. He said the ceilings weren't very high, and was worried about the environmental conditions—it's in a storage cellar. Actually, I thought he'd hand off the job to an assistant, but he took it on himself—he felt strongly about the challenge of it.

LSA: What was your time frame for completing the studio?

MC: We closed on the building in January and the first recording session was August 4th. The contractor walked out of the building the morning of August 4th—he'd been here, working all night. It was a miracle.

LSA: There must have been a lot to do.

MC: We gutted everything, it's all new down there. It's totally sound-isolated.

LSA: You must have needed plenty of new gear.

MC: I had a lot of what I needed but, of course, I needed more. I upgraded my Pro Tools system and got an Audient ACS-8024 analog console—also Apogee AD 16X and DA 16X converters, Dynaudio BM15A monitors, and Aviom A16 personal mixers. The biggest challenge was the grand piano; it took 30 seconds to get it down that tiny flight of stairs, and 45 minutes to get it around the corner and into the studio. The studio also has an array of instruments—two sets of drums, tons of percussion instruments, and a collection of guitars, mandolins, and banjos.

LSA: Is the studio completely finished at this point?

MC: The sound treatment of the rooms has been an ongoing process. We had too many high ends in one room and too many lows in another. So we've made some changes, but all the equipment

worked right away, which was great, because, with our narrow time frame, I was a wreck!

LSA: What other projects do you do at the studio?

MC: I do a number of things there, including drum and percussion tracks for singers and songwriters—and demos for new musicals. We did a country album last week, and mixed a jazz album the week before. Matt Winter, my cousin, is here working as an engineer, which is especially necessary, since I play on the majority of the music produced here.

LSA: Your brother, Jeff Croiter, is a very busy lighting designer. How did you both end up working on Broadway?

MC: Our mom was an actress, director, and producer. I was six, and was already sitting next to musicians in the pit. Jeff was hanging out with the lighting guys. We both learned a lot from being around theatre growing up.

LSA: Have you done all four years of *Avenue Q*?

MC: I've left the show from time to time. Last season, I did *Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life* on Broadway. I just came back from doing the first leg of that show's tour.

LSA: Are you back on *Avenue Q* right now?

MC: Yes. The *Avenue Q* management is great; they let me take time to do anything with Chita—I do her club act as well. I also keep a pretty busy gigging schedule in New York. Because the show has run so long, I have a core of people who can cover for me.

LSA: Does it get boring to play the same score for so long?

MC: Never, because I'm always doing so many different things, and *Avenue Q* is so much fun. Also, you have to remind yourself that an audience is there for the first time and only once. It has to be great every night.

LSA: It must be great to work with Chita.

MC: She's amazing, inspiring, and I'm very dedicated to her. From the very first *Dancer's Life* workshop to last week, Chita and I were the only two people who never missed a performance. She has a very special bond with her musicians, especially her rhythm section. She gives you 100 percent of herself, and it's thrilling to give it right back to her. ☺