

# Behind the music

## Hills native returns to roots in Canton studio

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Along Ford Road lies an unassuming industrial-style gray building — the sort of building cars pass by daily and motorists never really notice. Almost incognito with few windows, it rests across from a dusty dirt road in a modest area of Canton.

At first sight, it's not the sort of building that seems suitable for rock superstars like Redford's native son Ted Nugent, or the place where B-52's fans imagine hits like *Love Shack* and *Room* were captured.

The structure looks much to plain a place for Robert Plant and Jimmy Page to generate

some historic recordings. And yet this is all part of the intriguing history of Michigan Pro Audio's sound studio.

Built from the ground up by famed producer Ben Gross and once called Pearl Sound, the studio has contributed to the careers of some of the finest musicians in rock history.

"He built up a tremendous reputation here," said Jerry Capaldi, MPA senior manager. "Artists came through our doors like Madonna, Paula Abdul, George Clinton, the B-52's. There is a long tradition up to groups like Filter. Ben moved on (to open The Mix Room in California). Terry Simman founded Michigan Pro Audio."

Capaldi, who speaks quickly and calmly and wears a piano-key scarf that seems almost-too-appropriate, said the studio is poised for the future. With subsidized costs that now cater to local musicians who couldn't afford time at MPA in the past, the studio is now better able to serve artists in its own backyard.

### Farmington Hills native

That's where head engineer Chuck Alkazan comes in. Returning back to his roots this Farmington Hills-raised music producer spent the past three years working with major industry artists in Chicago. Now living in West Bloomfield, Alkazan is a graduate of the Berklee College of Music in Boston and a drummer for The Haywoods. When asked what brought him to MPA, the answer came easily.

"I liked this studio the best. It has very good sound. Everything from the control room to one of the best live recording rooms in the city. The vibe is cool."

The main recording room conveys a serious sense of sound. Blocking out all noise of the street outside, its walls are a tapestry of varied material — one rounded and wooden, the next softly padded, another made of painted brick. Three thick panes of glass separate the artist from the control room. Ceilings reach two stories high. Spotlights warmly illuminate the hardwood floor. All who work there say the same thing — it feels like home.

While Alkazan has made his way around New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, the Detroit area is where he plans to stay. "I think there is so much talent here that needs to be nurtured," said Alkazan. "A lot of Detroit artists just need some direction."

### Fostering talent

Relaxed in the back corner of



STAFF PHOTOS BY PAUL HERRICK/STAFF  
Manning boards: House engineer Ryan Hyland, left, works with Farmington Hills native Chuck Alkazan at the mixing board at Michigan Pro Audio in Canton.

the studio, he adjusts his black-rimmed glasses and speaks with enthusiasm of a return to Detroit's heyday. He's determined to make it happen. "This can be 1977 again, with Bob Seger and The Romantics," said Alkazan. It's hard not to believe the 29-year-old.

Alkazan shuffles from MPA studios in Canton, Southfield and Pontiac, working on projects from all genres of music to recordings for the advertising industry. Evidently, his love lies in music. He speaks in hope-filled phrases like the "Detroit brotherhood," and "making the city boom." More than 30 miles outside the Motor City, this Canton studio grasps onto the potential brought by the commercial success of giants like Kid Rock and Eminem.

On the day of my visit, Alkazan is just beginning work with Kevin Frye, an Ypsilanti-based

music producer working on a compilation for his label, Full Circle Enterprises, which dates back to 1996. Both seem to share a common goal: "To put Michigan artists on the map," as Frye said.

### Going global

To serve that interest, MPA signed on to work with a cyber record company — one which will enable music recorded at MPA to be marketed and seen via Web cameras worldwide. Still a work-in-progress, the site can be found at kdk12.com.

One local band participating in this technology is Baked Potato — set to release a new album in February. Rob Nelson, band member and a newly-hired engineer at the studio, has seen both sides of the recording process at MPA. The Northville resident considers the job to be a "good opportunity to be involved the

recording industry." He chose to record there because of the nostalgia and history associated with the studio. "I've always wanted to record in a big, live room," he added, smiling.

House engineer Ryan Hyland added: "The best thing about working here is being excited to get up everyday and go to work."

Baked Potato knew just what to call their album-in-progress — *Pearl*, after the original name of the studio. "The album has grown here, developed and taken on part of the vibe of this building," said Nelson.

Some buildings are made of much more than a pile of bricks, mortar and glass. Some are built on a foundation of rock, and not pop, soul, hip hop, jazz, blues and techno.

For more information, check out [www.mpa studios.com](http://www.mpa studios.com).



Mixing sound: Chuck Alkazan is happy to be back in Michigan.

## Noted rabbi to kick off SAJE series Feb. 13

Noted author, lecturer and spiritual leader Rabbi Lawrence Kushner will kick off the 2001 Seminars for Adult Jewish Enrichment on Tuesday, Feb. 13, at 7:30 p.m.

Rabbi Kushner's lecture will be held at the Jewish Community Center, D. Dan and Betty Kahn building, 6600 W. Maple, West Bloomfield.

His topic will be "The Silent Atonement: What Really Happened at Mount Sinai." Through his lectures, articles and books, Kushner helps shape the present agenda for personal as well as communal spiritual renewal. His teachings on spirituality explore The Mystical Revelation.

For more than 25 years, Kushner has used wisdom and humor

to promote spiritual renewal. He is the author of several books, including *The Book of Miracles: A Young Person's Guide to Jewish Spiritual Awareness*; *The Book of Words: Talking Spiritual Life and I Did Not Know: Finding Self, Spirituality and Ultimate Meaning*.

Recently he published his first book for young children, *Because Nothing Looks Like G-d*, co-authored with his wife, Karen. His latest book is *The Way Into Jewish Mystical Tradition*.

A Detroit native, Kushner is the first rabbi-in-residence at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion.

Beginning Feb. 27 and running through March 29, more than 35 adult Jewish education

courses will be offered through SAJE at both JCC locations: the Kahn building in West Bloomfield and the Jimmy Prentiss Morris building in Oak Park.

Among the courses taught by local rabbis, cantors, educators, scholars and community leaders are Jewish poetry, Jewish cooking, music, prayers, women and Judaism, Israel, Bible, Jewish law, children, ethics, Jewish mysticism, Jewish humor and spirituality. New this year are an online course, offsite classes

and programs for young adults and young families.

Those who register for two or more SAJE courses at the Kushner lecture will receive a free, autographed book by Kushner. Individuals who become a friend of SAJE by making a donation of \$136 or more will receive an autographed book and unlimited classes.

Tuition for SAJE courses is \$15 per course or \$36 for unlimited courses. Call Eliza Freilich at the JCC, 661-7649.

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