

Turn it Down

The digital revolution has provided an opportunity for musicians and individuals to have a state of the art project recording studio at very reasonable prices. Of course there are always some expensive wish lists associated with any sound situation. As the owner of a 36 track Tascam DA 88 studio, I can honestly testify that I get the best sounds of my instrument, the vibraphone, than any studio I've ever been in. As most project studios are located in private homes, one of the most obvious concerns is with acoustical separation from both outside noises and between instruments being recorded.

Most commercial recording studios are built from the ground up with acoustics in mind and usually have separate rooms for drums, vocals, control room etc, offering complete isolation and sound control. Keep in mind these buildings cost several 100 of thousands even before the recording equipment is included. With the availability of high quality, low cost digital machines and consoles, the comparable sound quality to the major studios is negligible. How then do we record in our project studios and control the acoustics allowing some semblance of isolation? This is the question that I've been looking to resolve for the last few years. I didn't want to build a permanent drum booth in my room because it is my home, though this space is dedicated for the studio. I just felt that if I ever wanted to relocate that this permanent install would be a problem. I also wanted the flexibility to use this studio space for rehearsals and other music situations that might not require recording and did not want to commit the space for a permanent booth. I've tried recording with headphones and all electric instruments going direct and miking my vibes. This works except for the drums. I tried recording the drums at a later time that didn't really seem to work with the spontaneity of jazz. The answer has to be some sort of isolation.

THE POWER OF FOAM.

As an instrumentalist of rather loud instruments, the percussion family, I've always been faced with situations where simply practicing effected those around me including neighbors. This volume situation became more of a problem when I went to college and needed to practice in my apartment. I immediately found out which of my neighbors liked music. Auralex's new Max-Wall and Studio Foam products could be the answer. The version of the Max-Wall that I ordered included the extra extenders giving the Max-Wall a height of approximately 7.5 feet. My studio has 8-foot high ceilings, which meant a gap of 6 – 8 inches from the top of the Max-Wall to the acoustical tile ceiling. This was easy to fill with miscellaneous foam pieces. The Max-Wall sets up very easily suspending on a regular provided mike stand with a hole down through the foam. The foam panels interlock to allow strength and a cohesive bond. The Max-Wall that I'm using consists of 3 walls with expanders to approximately 7.5 feet and 3 optional window units.

At first, I was a bit disappointed in Max-Wall's acoustical isolation. I notified my contacts at Auralex and was informed that because my back 2 walls were plain painted drywall that I was getting a lot of bounce and sound transferring through the wall. Their recommendation was to apply 4" studio foam on the back walls inside the area enclosed by the Max-Wall and use LENROD bass traps in the corners. I went with their

recommendation and believe I've found a workable solution. No, this is not a totally sound isolated drum booth but enough to accommodate a tasteful jazz drummer and offer enough separation to record in. The fact that the Max-Wall system is very light and portable allows for it to be used in a variety of situations such as, vocal booth, instrument isolation chamber, etc. OK, I don't have the permanent drum booth with total isolation, however, I have a working situation that allows for flexibility of use and set-up. A compromise has been reached.

Other uses for the Max-Wall system could be for reducing sound level while practicing. This use could be very beneficial for percussionists needing to practice in homes or apartments. Again, this system does not offer total isolation, but enough of a sound level reduction to allow you to remain friends with neighbors and roommates. With the optional window kit, eye contact with the player behind the Max-Wall can be maintained. Again, this is a compromise situation and does not compare to a pro recording studio, however, for most, the Auralex products mentioned should offer ample sound level reduction and with proper miking and instrument placement, a fairly high degree of isolation can be maintained.

The Max-Wall does not offer complete floor to ceiling coverage, and obvious sound leakage is a potential problem. I filled these spaces with foam blocks that added to the enhanced effect. Sound also tends to transmit through the floor, depending on the type of flooring, and it would be beneficial to have some sort of floating floor type treatment if necessary. As you can see, there is an obvious corollary between the ultimate sound isolation and the amount of foam products and thus the cost of obtaining the desired treatment. The closer we get to total sound isolation, the more it costs and the more we tend to get closer to a permanent sound isolation booth. How far you want to go is obviously a personal decision. At least with these Auralex products we have a choice.