

## THEY LIVE AMONG US

## Grammy-winning recording engineer runs studio at Pacifica

BY J.D. ROGERS

Dennis Dragon operates The Studio @ Pacifica. He is also the Grammy-winning recording engineer for "Love Will Keep Us Together" by The Captain & Tennille. The following interview with J.D. Rogers took place at Dennis' recording studio at Pacifica in Williams, Oregon.

**J.D.:** Dennis, how long have you lived in Williams?

**Dennis:** I moved here five years ago from Santa Barbara, California.

**J.D.:** Why did you leave Santa Barbara for Williams?

**Dennis:** I got really tired of the "Southern California dream," the lack of genuineness of the people, putting on personas, etc. I hate to generalize, but that's how it was. I felt like there were very few genuine humans left down there. Too many "rats in the cage."

**J.D.:** How is it that Williams is where you wound up?

**Dennis:** A long-time friend who had been living in Ojai, California, had moved to Williams. I had never even been to Oregon. Always wanted to, but hadn't made the time. I came up to check it out and thought it was really cool. There was actually some air up here and no smog. Having lived in pollution, I appreciated that. The trees looked nice, the sky was blue. This would be a good place to hang, I thought.

Then my friend asked me if I'd like to see Steve Miller's old recording studio. What? Steve Miller had a studio here? I've got to see it. When I did, I knew I had to get in there because, if I had the money, this is exactly how I would have built it. This was designed as a world-class recording studio in a barn!

**J.D.:** Give us a little background on yourself. Are you a musician and a recording engineer?

**Dennis:** I've played drums and percussion since the age of five, if that's considered music. A lot of people question that. I played percussion on the road or in the studio with the Beach Boys, Neil Young, the Byrds, Rick Springfield, and the Surf Punks, a band I formed in 1976. I also play a little piano.

From the technical end of it, at a young age I was fascinated with early tape recorders in the mid 1950s that were manufactured by Ampex Corporation that my father would have in his studio. My dad was Carmen Dragon, a symphony conductor, composer and arranger; my mother Eloise was a soprano singer. So music is basically in my blood.

**J.D.:** Tell me about all those gold and platinum records I was looking at hanging on the wall when I walked into the studio.

**Dennis:** Ah, the "wall of shame."

**J.D.:** How were you involved in those recordings?

**Dennis:** Those recordings were my bread and butter in the mid to late 1970s. My brother Daryl is the Captain of Captain & Tennille. I worked on most of their hits as an engineer in Hollywood. I also worked with Johnny Rivers on some of his hits, and Lou Adler for many years. He's a big producer with a lot of big groups and hits under his belt. So I've done it, but when it turned into being no

there, but that's also human interaction!

That's what I love and that's what I miss in this "perfected technique via computer era" to fix everything—pitch, time, everything is just right. I didn't grow up with that; it's not natural and I don't appreciate it. I'm pretty computer savvy, I can do all that. I just shy away from it.

**J.D.:** With your engineering and producer background, you are a valuable



**Photo, top:** Dennis explained to J.D. Rogers about "Recording 101": Volume does not need to be set on 27; most knobs go only to 10. Photo: J.D. Rogers

**Photo, bottom:** Dennis adjusts vocal recording microphone for Alice DiMichele, who recorded a children's CD at the studio. Photo: Mikey.

fun anymore—too much stress, then it was time to leave. So I left.

**J.D.:** What's your goal with this studio?

**Dennis:** Keeping live music alive. I came up here to perpetuate live music recording. Everybody out there in the studio playing at the same time—I think that's how some of the greatest recordings were made. That's what this studio was built for. So there's a little mistake here or

resource for anyone wanting to make a recording.

**Dennis:** Yeah, I am kind of a great resource because I'm still relatively coherent, too! I remember all the recording techniques going back to the 1950s through today. I have equipment dating back through the years that still sounds fantastic. My computer system over there keeps me up-to-date on all the latest and greatest programs. So all the while I'm

alive and well, I think I consider myself a pretty good resource.

**J.D.:** Did Steve Miller record any of his hits in here?

**Dennis:** I've received mixed information on that topic from nothing to a lot. So I don't know. Not that it matters but it would be cool to know he recorded "Fly Like an Eagle" in here. There's a picture of Steve on the wall above your head—he's overseeing us right now.

**J.D.:** Do you use or record local musicians?

**Dennis:** Oh, yeah. Jeff Cooper's working in here now on his new song, The Family Carr did their CD here. Windsong [a singer/songwriter in Williams, Oregon] recorded her CD, *Ode to Water*; Alice DiMichele just finished a great children's CD here; Christina Duane; and the rock band 100 Watt Mind has recorded here, too, and so forth. Most all of the locals know about me and the studio at this point.

**J.D.:** Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the studio?

**Dennis:** One of the main reasons I'm here—my vision is to create a totally interactive recording studio, cameras everywhere; hopefully that will happen this year. So, say a group comes in here to record and their fans want to watch the session. Folks will be able to eavesdrop via the Internet to see just how a "classic" recording studio session works. Of course, if you're doing stuff you don't want people to see, we can also turn off certain cameras!

**J.D.:** Dennis, it's been great to learn that we have such a talent as you with a world-class recording studio right here in the Applegate. Thanks for your time.

**Dennis:** Thanks for coming by. Rock ON!

You can learn more about Dennis' recording operation at [dragonfamilyfoundation.org](http://dragonfamilyfoundation.org), or email Dennis at [dragonfoundation@aol.com](mailto:dragonfoundation@aol.com) or call 541-234-4203.

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### Dennis Dragon's TOP TEN Albums of All Time

1. *Sgt. Pepper* by The Beatles
2. *Axis: Bold as Love* by Jimi Hendrix
3. *Led Zeppelin* (first album)
4. *My Beach* by Surf Punks
5. *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis
6. *Computer World* by Kraftwerk
7. *Ramones* (first album)
8. *Calypsos* by Edmundo Ros
9. *Bringing It All Back Home* by Bob Dylan
10. *The Nightfly* by Donald Fagen

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