HOME STUDIO
PATTY LARKIN

BY DANIEL KELLER

IF PATTY LARKIN'S MUSIC typifies anything, it's the atypical. Her songs roam the lyrical map like a bunch of short stories that suddenly find themselves between the same covers. Her arrangements weave familiar bits of thread into uniquely exotic fabrics. Her vocal performances can reside anywhere from the soulfully guttural to the ethereally unreal. And her albums are unabashed in their eclecticism: vast forays through musical worlds that can't possibly work together, but somehow do.

Capturing this degree of depth and intimacy is aided in no small part by her working environment. Her Road Narrows Studio in Cape Cod sits poised at the crust of a continent, a perfectly timeless milieu from which to hot-wire the muse. There, with co-producers Bette Warner and Ben Wittman, she recently completed *Red=Luck*, her 10th solo album.

"I wanted to do something very different for this album. I put myself through two very intensive 30-day writing sessions. I think there's a commonality between the songs because they happened days apart rather than months apart. I also intentionally avoided the guitar for much of the writing process, making it secondary to the song. I think that change of perspective helped to channel some different ideas."

Although Patty has always worked on music at home, the evolution of her home studio is fairly recent. "I actually had an old **Tascam 388** in here for a few years for a sketchpad. When we started [1997's] *Perishable Fruit*, someone encouraged me to get an **Alesis ADAT** so I could keep the sketches in the digital domain. That almost immediately became 24 tracks of ADAT and a **BRC**, with a **Mackie 24x8**. We used a couple of **API** preamps and a **CAD E300** mic for tracking, an **Alesis Quadraverb** and a pair of **Yamaha NS10**'s—pretty low-tech. For *Regrooving the Dream* we used the same basic setup, but we rented a rack of **Focusrite** mic pre's and **Apogee** converters for a nice, clean front end. We still stayed pretty basic, though—not a lot of compression or EQ, though we did use a **Lexicon JamMan** for creating loops."

Photo by Jana Leon

PATTY LARKIN

Singer-songwriter Patty Larkin began her recording career in the mid-'80s and became known for her introspective and adventurous compositions. A favorite on the folk circuit, Larkin has worked with Bruce Cockburn, Rosanne Cash, John Hiatt, Catie Curtis and John Gorka. A proficient musician as well, Larkin's guitar style has been compared to Bonnie Raitt. Larkin's latest album, *Red=Luck*, was recently released on Vanguard Records.

It was during the recording of *Red=Luck* that the studio would begin its next transition. "I originally had a much different concept for the album. I wanted it to be like a little chamber orchestra and the band. We played around with a bunch of arrangements, tracking to Ben's **Pro Tools** rig, but it seemed like there was just too much going on, and it took away from the emotion in the vocals. We were pretty happy with what we'd done with the vocals on the last album, so in the end we opted to track the same way, with just me playing guitar to Ben's drums, and then build around those performances."

Working with the arrangements in Pro Tools was cut short when Wittman had to return to New York. "We dumped the tracks to ADAT and continued working, but I really liked a lot of what we could do with the computer, and I ended up getting a **Digi 001** setup for the studio here."

The ability to move seamlessly between ADAT and computers meant that creative focus could be given to the music and each song could get its own unique treatment. "With some of the tracks, like 'Normal,' 'Home,' 'St. Augustine' and 'Cranes,' we ended up keeping the original ADAT performances. With others, like 'Too Bad,' we really turned them around a lot to try and find where they lived, and it was great to have a computer for some of that."

That said, she's still not getting caught up in technology for technology's sake. "Whether it's a cassette recorder or a computer, I feel that a home studio for a performing songwriter is as essential as sketch pads and colors are to an artist. It doesn't have to be particularly high-tech, as long as it provides a way to work out your ideas and discover your songs." ■