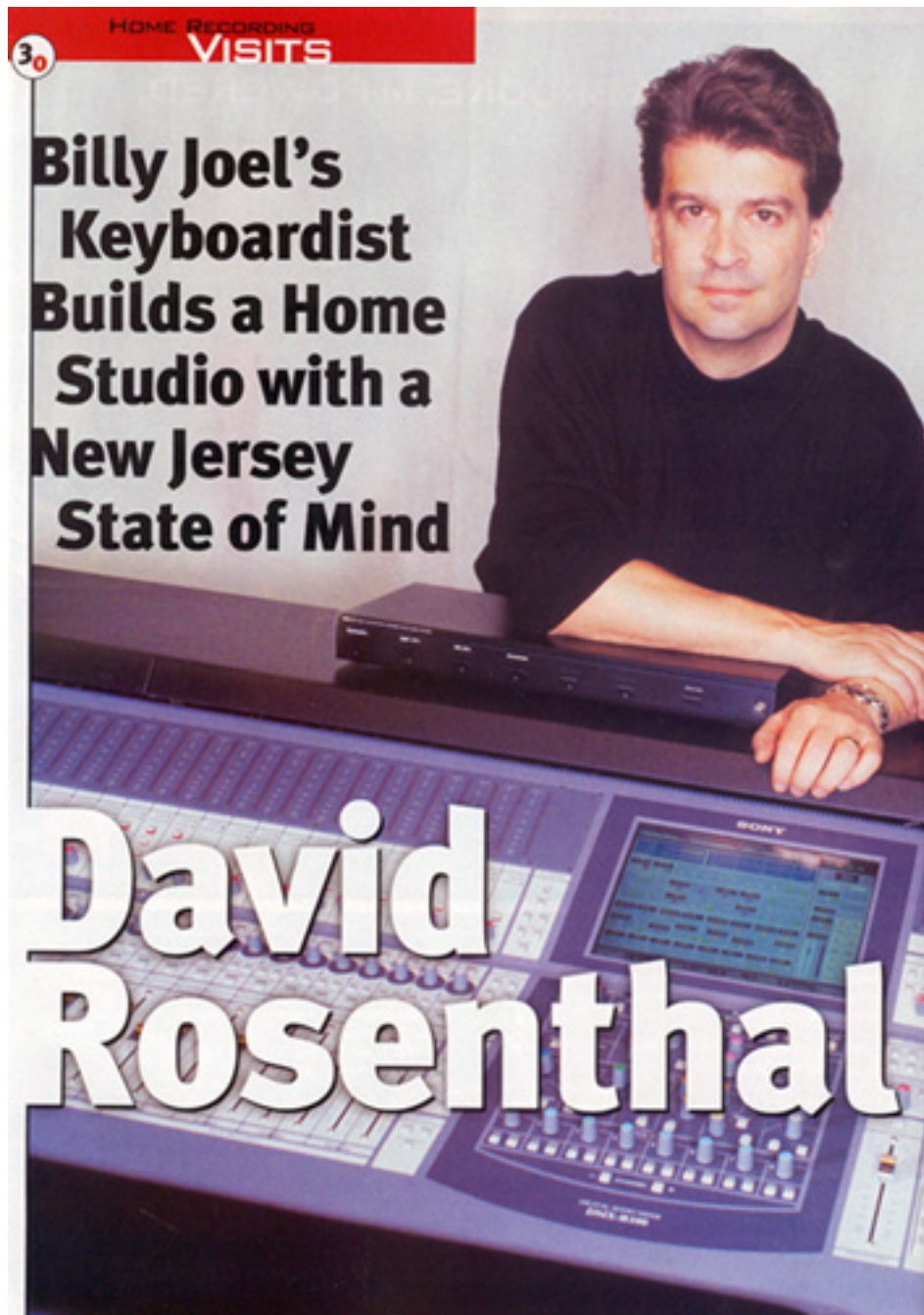


(Note: This article refers to David's old studio. For details on his new studio, [please click here.](#))

Billy Joel's Keyboardist Builds a Home Studio with a New Jersey State of Mind

By Craig Jackson

Photography by Nelson Kwok



Those of you who aren't familiar with veteran keyboardist David Rosenthal have likely heard his playing on more than one CD. Rosenthal, a graduate of Berklee College of Music, has been performing and recording professionally for more than 18 years with artists such as Rainbow, Little Steven, Cyndi Lauper, Robert Palmer, Whitesnake, Steve Vai, Dream Theater, Happy the Man, and many others. He is currently working with Billy Joel, with whom he has been touring since 1993.

When Rosenthal isn't on the road, he is often in the basement studio of his New Jersey home, which has evolved over the years from a practice room with a basic 4-track setup to a state-of-the-art recording facility. "I've been in the same place for a little over 12 years," Rosenthal says. "It wasn't a studio overnight - little by

little it came together. I guess my initial motivation was to have a convenient way to record my ideas and present them to other people, because in the early '80s the ability to do master quality recording from your house didn't exist."

Today, the studio, affectionately known as "[Sonic Adventures](#)," is much more than just a place to generate new ideas. It's comprised of three spaces: a control room, a live room, and a lounge. Rosenthal has acquired a full Digidesign Pro Tools 24/Mix Plus system with extensive plug-ins as well as a Sony DMX-R100 48-channel digital console. He's augmented the recording system with vintage pieces like a Neve Prism Rack and a Tube Tech MP1A tube mic preamp, which help bridge the gap between analog and digital.



As recording gear improved and became more affordable over the years, Rosenthal upgraded his studio, sticking with TASCAM as he made the gradual change from reel-to-reel to digital. "I started with a 38, which I used for many years. That was replaced with a TASCAM ½" 16-track, and eventually that got replaced with three DA-88s." The turning point for Rosenthal came when the studio made the transition to the digital world of the DA-88s. "When I got the DA-88s, I went from 16 to 24 tracks. At that time, sequencers were starting to become pretty reliable in the way they locked up with tape machines. By being able to record 24 racks of digital audio and run all of my keyboards virtually, I really could do a whole record," Rosenthal says. "So when I made the jump to the digital world, I was in a position to do some pretty good recordings."



Today, Rosenthal's studio is continually being upgraded to take advantage of the latest trends in technology and functionality. "I just replaced my old Carvin Console with a Sony DMX-R100, so now is the beginning of the next era of the studio," he explains. "Now I'm able to mix bigger projects here, because the console has total recall and automation and is as powerful a tool as anything else in the studio."



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Before the studio had the Pro Tools system and the Sony console, Rosenthal would take his tapes to larger facilities for final mixdown, a common practice among professionals with home studios in the early days of the home recording revolution. "At the time, I didn't have a great console," Rosenthal explains, "so I wouldn't mix stuff here, but I would record direct into the tape decks through a Tube Tech mic pre. Eventually I got a rack of Neves [high-end channel strip modules]. Now my signal path on the way to tape has the same quality as any major studio."

Rosenthal approaches each project differently, based on the client's need. "There's no real set process," he says. "It largely depends on what type of project I'm doing, and I let that dictate what I do. For example, the project I'm producing now is really heavy. The tracks had to have live drums cut at the same time as the bass and guitar. By using Amp Farm I was able to record everyone simultaneously in one room without any leakage on the drum mics. For other types of projects, I would program the drums into a sequencer or use the drums as a trigger source. In those situations, I start with some type of map on the sequencer and then build it from there."

Having a complete state-of-the-art studio in his home has opened up other opportunities for Rosenthal. "There's a band in Japan called Niji-Densetsu. What that means in Japanese is 'Legends of Rainbow,'" Rosenthal says. "They're a Rainbow tribute band, and they were recording a tribute album. They wanted to get a couple of the original guys from the band to play on it, but they didn't have any kind of budget to fly me over to Japan, so we worked out a deal and they sent me the master tapes on DA-88. I put all my keyboard tracks on a couple of songs and sent them back. Things like that are great to be able to do without ever leaving my house."

Arguably the biggest advantage for anybody producing in a home studio is the freedom from the time and budget constraints of a commercial studio. As Rosenthal explains, "I'm a tweaker wherever I go, and [the home studio] environment is really good for me. Very few people can just go into a studio and be creative while the clock is running. Having a studio at home also enables me to work at a freer pace and do multiple projects at the same time. For example, I could do something like that Rainbow project over the course of a week as opposed to one day. It's a big convenience. It also enables me to do better work, at least as a keyboard player. I have a pretty large arsenal of keyboard gear, and it's all here set up and ready to go, but if I go out to another studio for a project, they often complain about big cartage bills. All this gear takes time to set up. When I do sessions at my studio, clients can just come here when they are ready to do the keyboard overdubs, and everything is all set."

Rosenthal's studio has allowed him to be creative and ultimately improved the quality of his work. "It's really

amazing how much power I have now at a relatively affordable price," he says. "It's a great time to have a home studio."

