

CORIN ASHLEY

BOSTON POPSTER RECORDS AT ABBEY ROAD

By T.Blake Littwin; photo by Martin Carr



It's more or less impossible to create music in a vacuum. Every artist looks to their predecessors for inspiration, picking and choosing the bits and pieces that eventually become part of their own sound. For Boston pop aficionado and Beatles devotee Corin Ashley, the process took him one step further. In 2006, on break from his bass-playing duties in The Pills, Ashley released his sharp and catchy solo debut, *Songs From The Brill Bedroom*, which received widespread praise and was nominated for three BMAs. His yet unreleased follow up was recorded in a veritable shrine of rock 'n' roll history: Studio 2 at Abbey Road.

"The whole thing completely twisted my wig, honestly," Ashley recalls. "It was the ultimate buzz for the particular brand of geek that I am, but at the same time, I had seen so many photos and thought about the studio so many times that it felt like I had been there before. It was like stepping into a movie that you love."

Surreal surrounding aside, this musical mystery tour was grounded in a collection of well thought-out songs. "I really just had this lifelong fantasy about recording there," says Ashley. "I'm always writing, so I was squirreling away songs for some sort of follow up to the last album, but once I actually had time booked at Abbey Road, I thought I should really have something decent to record there. I spent a few weeks tidying up some song ideas I had and came up with three solid gold hits worth laying down."

For Ashley (who also listens to Harry Nilsson, Bob Dylan, Fleet Foxes, Kelley Stoltz and old soul music), the session at Abbey Road also afforded him the chance to use the vintage gear and instruments that were part and parcel to the Fab Four sound.

Like any devoted fan, he was well versed in the technological history of the studio.

"I had a fairly good idea of what to expect when I got there and I knew that what I mainly wanted to capture was things particular to that room," he says. "To me, that meant using the signature pianos that The Beatles used on all their songs. There are essentially three pianos that are on 99% of The Beatles' recordings, so I simply made sure to put the drums where Ringo put his, use the same mics and definitely use those pianos."

The simplicity of the old setup was a reward unto itself. "There was no tweaking of sounds, no hitting a snare drum for an hour. We put those mics through an old EMI board and when we brought the faders up, it sounded fantastic immediately. It was a dream."

For Ashley, working with the legendary pianos, mics, compressors and mixing board was "a bit daunting, but I thought the very experience of recording anything in Studio 2 would be amazing and didn't feel any pressure to write something as good as 'Strawberry Fields Forever.'"

But in the end, it's the little things that remind artists of the musical lineage that they carry on in their own work. Like dust.

"The most striking thing was leaving the control room to have a wee and seeing a Studer 4 track machine that was used on *Sgt. Pepper* just sitting in the hallway, ready for use. It was like 'Ooh, I'm giving that a good rub for luck'. There was Beatle dust all over it, you know."

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