

Helping budding rock stars realize their dreams



Photo by Krystle Chow

Chad Nesrallah is the owner of Fat Dog Productions, a recording studio on Hunt Club Rd. The Brookfield High School graduate advises aspiring artists to learn as much as possible about the music scene.

By Krystle Chow

Chad Nesrallah of Fat Dog Productions chuckles as he tells the story of how he played a practical joke on some of the young musicians who participated in the company's summer program.

"We told them this was the cover for their demo disc," he says, holding out a grainy black-and-white computer print-out on plain paper. "I said we'd worked all night on it."

Of course, the actual demo disc cover was full-colour and glossy — a professional production from one of the few large studios left in Ottawa.

It's part of Mr. Nesrallah's philosophy for Fat Dog Productions; especially with his two-week Rock Star Camp program to train youth who are interested in becoming professional artists — to have fun while coming out with a good product.

"We're trying to make sure people are aware of the realities of the music business and think about it. That was one angle (for opening the camp)," he says. "The other angle was 'let's have fun and explore what we can do.'"

Mr. Nesrallah owns and runs Fat Dog Productions and the School of Recording Arts, located on Hunt Club Rd. near Uplands Dr., which provides artists and audio technicians with the basics of production in a 12-week practical course.

The course covers everything from introductory audio engineering to the legalities of copyright and the business side of production, to knowing how to handle artists and keep them comfortable during recording sessions.

Business is split between the two enterprises; Mr. Nesrallah says the music industry is seasonal, meaning that both the studio and the school are busy at different times of the year.

"When it's -40 and a blizzard out, creativity tends to drop. So, often times when it gets really cold, our studio's not quite as active and the school helps balance that out for us," says the Brookfield High School graduate. "But summer time is a completely different story — everybody's relaxed and ready to record."

Ottawa's an interesting place to have a music studio, Mr. Nesrallah says. There's a lot of potential for artist development, with good support from a tightly knit local community.

However, because there aren't a lot of music labels in the city, artists aren't able to get guidelines and tips for what their material should sound like, he adds.

What's more, new trends in the audio business mean that more people are able to produce stuff more cheaply without using the big studios.

Mr. Nesrallah says, though, that business is still quite good because there are artists who know they can get higher-quality sound at a studio than if they were to use some of the popular home software available on the market.

"Things have shifted a little bit, but not overly dramatically," he says. "It's one thing to have all the tools but it's another thing to really know how to use them. So we still get

a fair amount of artists who know the difference and will come and let us do what we do."

While none of the studio's clients have "really blown up yet," Mr. Nesrallah points to a few acts he's produced who have had some success in Canada and abroad; notably John Allaire who has enjoyed recognition south of the border and in Europe, and Gatineau blues singer Roxanne Potvin.

Mr. Nesrallah advises aspiring artists to learn as much as possible about the music scene, both musically and business-wise, and focus on what they want if they hope to do well.

"I'd say you need to be really aware of the scene, and know where you want to go before you start — that's the most important thing."