

MIX

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SESSIONS

Megan McCormick—'Honest Words,' Honest Music

Megan McCormick is a young singer/songwriter/guitarist with a singular pop-rock sound. It's almost unfair to make such comparisons, but imagine a voice like k.d. lang's but younger and breathier, and electric guitar work that's effortless and emotional. With the help of a great group of musicians and Grammy-winning producer/engineer/mixer Dave O'Donnell, this Nashville-based artist has recorded an impressive debut album, *Honest Words* (Rykodisc).

The album was made in three sessions (live band tracking, vocals/overdubs and editing/mixing), starting with band tracks at Paul Moak's Smoakstack Studios in Nashville. "We had a great experience down there; the studio has everything you need, and Paul also has a lot of guitars and amps that he would let us use," says O'Donnell. "Megan plays a Gibson Valley Arts guitar, the Brent Mason model. She gets a great tone out of it and used it on almost every song, though we used a Gibson 335 on a few songs. Megan is as good a guitar player as anybody I've worked with." O'Donnell's credits include Eric

Clapton, John Mayer, James Taylor and many others.

McCormick uses a few pedals: "a Tube Screamer, analog delay and digital reverb, which she varies depending on the song," O'Donnell says. From there, her guitar goes through a Vox amp (or a Fender for the 335) that is miked with a Shure SM57 and a Royer ribbon, each captured to its own Pro Tools track. "I tend to record things pretty flat," he says. "For guitars, if there's a lot of picking and it's dynamic, I might also use a [UREI] 1176. If it's not, I won't use a lot of compression. On [Rich Brinsfield's] bass, we used an LA-2A—that was direct and through a B15 amp."

A few of the tracks feature Viktor Krauss on upright bass, which O'Donnell miked with a Neumann U47 through an LA-2A. On Lee Holland's kit, O'Donnell used techniques he learned early in his career at New York City's famed Power Station Studios (now Avatar). On snare, 57s top and bottom; Sennheiser 421s on toms; a 57, AKG 451 or Neumann KM84 on hi-hat; Coles ribbons overhead; and a few other mics set up by the studio. "They also had what I think was a driver from an NS-10 on the kick—the speaker acting like a mic through a direct—so you get a great sub sound."

When band tracks were complete, O'Donnell and McCormick headed up to New York City to add vocals and mix. O'Donnell captured McCormick's voice in Maximum Volume, a studio owned and (usually) operated by Kyle Kelso in the same building as O'Donnell's Studio D (Yamaha DM2000 board, ProAc Studio 100 monitors), where the album was mixed. "The vocal mic was a Peluso 22 251 tube mic," he recalls. "It worked great for her voice. The chain was then to a Chandler LTD-1 mic pre and 1176 compressor. I don't EQ vocals when recording and I also don't compress a lot, though for 'Addiction' and 'Shiver' I remember hitting the 1176 harder.

"I'll spend more time on vocals," O'Donnell continues. "It's the most important thing. And the great thing about Megan was she was willing to try anything."

—Barbara Schultz



Megan McCormick's debut album was engineered and produced by Dave O'Donnell.