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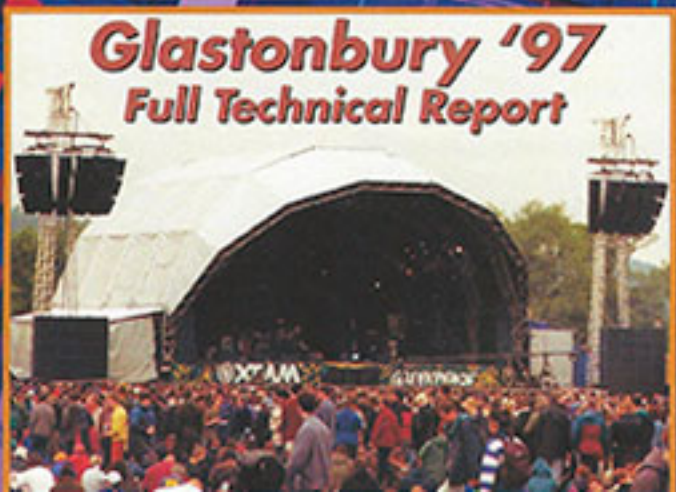
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Part One — Rio de Janeiro

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The control room of studio one at Mega Estudios, Rio de Janeiro. The console is an SSL SL 4064 G+ with Total Recall™ and Ultimotion™.

When one thinks of Brazil, images of carnivals, golden beaches, and a fabulous soccer team usually come to mind. But do you think of high-end professional audio facilities on a par with any in the world? Probably not. Audio Media Editor ROBERT ALEXANDER flew to Brazil to find out for himself about the business in South America's largest country.

Think of Brazil. What comes to your mind? Carnival? Coffee? Long golden beaches? Or, perhaps, a world-beating soccer team, current holders of the soccer World Cup? Did you imagine that in this, the largest country in South America, with a population of over 150 million and a land mass only slightly smaller than that of the United States, there would be professional audio facilities to match those found anywhere in the world? Probably not.

The surprise is that Brazil, despite its recent problems with corruption, and a crippling economy that has forced many to deal in foreign exchange far away from its financial centres, is a country that has a huge wealthy population. Of course the country also has an enormous poor population who live in the infamous slum areas of Brazil's cities known as the 'Favelas'. Away from the economic and social problems that face this predominantly Portuguese-speaking nation, there is a feeling that recent times have seen a move away from this distinctive

'third-world' past. Indeed, as many of the people told me during my recent visit, 'Brazil is a third-world country with first-world tendencies'.

An Unstable Past — A Brighter Future

With any so-called third-world nation that wishes to deal with so-called first-world countries in order to import goods and equipment to improve its circumstances, the condition of the currency in which you deal is paramount to establishing a sense of trust and a good business relationship. Brazil, unfortunately, has had no record in its recent past of having a stable currency. Indeed, since 1990, Brazil's currency has actually changed no less than three times: from Cruzeiro to Cruzeiro-Real and, in July 1994, from Cruzeiro-Real to plain Real (which means 'real' or 'true').

The new currency was part of an enormous plan instigated by the current President of the country, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, when he was Finance Minister, designed to modernise the entire infrastructure of the nation. Its value was introduced by the central banks in Brazil at an exchange rate of R\$0.85 to one US Dollar. The astonishing thing (in Brazilian terms) is that in 1997, four years after its introduction, the Real exchanges at a rate very close to 1:1 with the US Dollar — a testimony to the astonishing financial and sociological achievements of the current government in Brazil.

This new-found stability has meant that, for the first time in decades, businesses in Brazil are able to trade freely outside the country and are able to purchase the much needed technology that can raise a nation above its poverty and its debt-ridden past.

BUSINESS IN BRAZIL

As always, however, there is a catch. Most foreign companies will expect pre-payment in US Dollars or another well recognised currency, which must usually be held in an off-shore bank and, as if that wasn't bad enough, for most high-technology items — such as professional audio equipment — there is a 70 percent import duty enforced by the government.

This single crippling factor is responsible for much of the delay in getting Brazil's trade economy back on its feet and is, more often than not, the sole reason why other countries find trade with Brazil so daunting. That aside, trade does exist and is growing at an enormous rate, fuelled by the new feeling of economic and social stability in the country. I witnessed this at first hand, having friends in Rio de Janeiro who candidly explained to me the current state of national pride in the achievements of the last few years, bearing in mind the country's somewhat shady past.

Professional Facilities

I was, I have to confess, surprised by the impressive quality of the professional audio facilities I visited in Brazil. Having tried to banish any preconceptions of what I was likely to find, I was totally taken aback by the number and quality of those that I did see. I visited the two largest cities in Brazil: Rio de Janeiro, with a population of around 12 million, and São Paulo, the world's second largest city (after Mexico City) with a sprawling 18.5 million people.

In Rio I went to see recording studios, dubbing studios, television studios, record companies and met a host of audio professionals from engineers and technicians to studio owners, A&R men, DJs and mixing engineers — in fact the full spectrum of personnel that make up this industry.

Mega Estudios

In the heart of Humaitá, a wealthy suburb of Rio, is the most impressive of Brazil's recording studio facilities, Mega Estudios. Opened in June 1996, this expanding facility is quite enormous in size, and is comparable in square meters to London's Abbey Road or New York's Right Track studios. The owners, brothers Alvaro and Luiz Affonso Otero, are bankers who financed the project with the intention, from the outset, of becoming the country's leading recording, post production and multimedia studio.



RIO DE JANEIRO

The building itself occupies a site which — according to Liber Gadeña, Head of the music recording facilities and part owner of Indie records, a local label — “has still not satisfied the Otero Brothers’ passion for expansion, despite its already not-inconsiderable size. With that in mind they decided to buy the remainder of the entire hill on which the studio is built — including the residential properties of our near neighbours — who will, presumably, all have to move out in the near future as the builders move in.”



The live room of studio one at Mega Estudios, looking out onto the skyline of Rio de Janeiro.

BUSINESS IN BRAZIL

Mega Estudios was named 'Mega' not because of its size but because of the millions (the literal meaning of 'mega') of facilities they offer. The studios are spread over several floors in the existing building and are interconnected with an extraordinary elevator system, each floor of which has brushed stainless steel doors reminiscent of a huge bank vault.

On the first floor are the post production studios where an SSL Omnimix system is currently housed in the sound production room — the first such system to be installed in South America — and the on-line video post room houses a Quantel Henry. A multimedia compositing room is under development with Pro Tools, and plans are being drawn up to increase this side of the business dramatically once the complex is completed.

Philippe Neiva, Head of the post production department and a very successful jingles composer in Brazil, told me: "We have plans here at Mega Estudios to develop the post production side of our business over the next few years to compete for work that is currently being done by much smaller, less well equipped facilities. We bought the Omnimix in 1996 for just that purpose and, coupled with the Quantel Henry for post production and the Pro Tools systems which we use in our music rooms, we have made a pretty impressive start."

Only The Best Will Do

On the second and third floors of the building are

the two main music recording studios. The two control rooms are exactly the same size as each other, although the live area on floor three is some 30 percent larger than that of the floor below it. Large enough in size to cater for medium-sized orchestras, both studios have massive ten-ton air conditioning systems capable

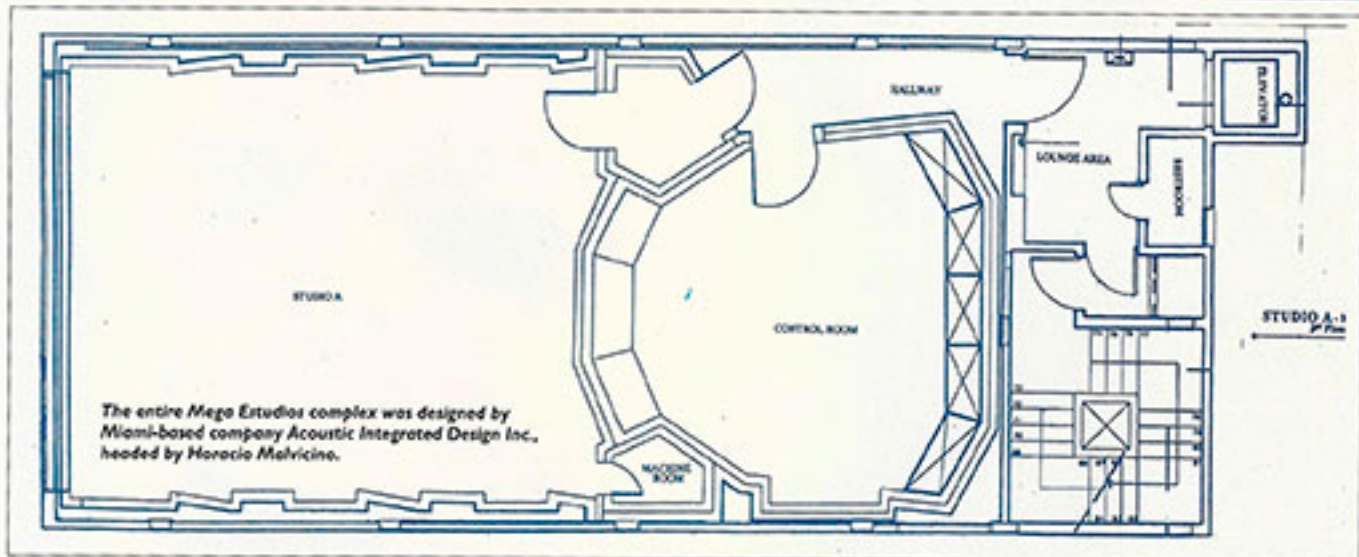
of keeping even the hottest Brazilian day at bay. At the far end of each recording room are retractable panels which reveal windows looking out over Rio de Janeiro's rooftops towards the beaches.

The control rooms are excellently equipped, with an SSL SL 4064 G+ with Total Recall™ and



The post production room of studio one at Mega Estudios, with an SSL Omnimix System — the first such system to be installed in South America.





► **Ultimation™** on the third floor, and a Neve V2/60-channel console with Flying Faders™ on the second floor. Monitoring is by Westlake BBSM15s, with Genelec nearfields and, in addition, Yamaha and Tannoy. The outboard (which was practically duplicated in each room) consisted of an Amek 9098 single channel EQ, JoeMeek VC1, two Lexicon 480Ls + LARC, a PCM80 and PCM90, as well as the new MPX1; various examples of the Drawmer and dbx range of dynamics processors, Yamaha SPX990, REV5 and REV7s, virtually the entire range of Tube-Tech valve

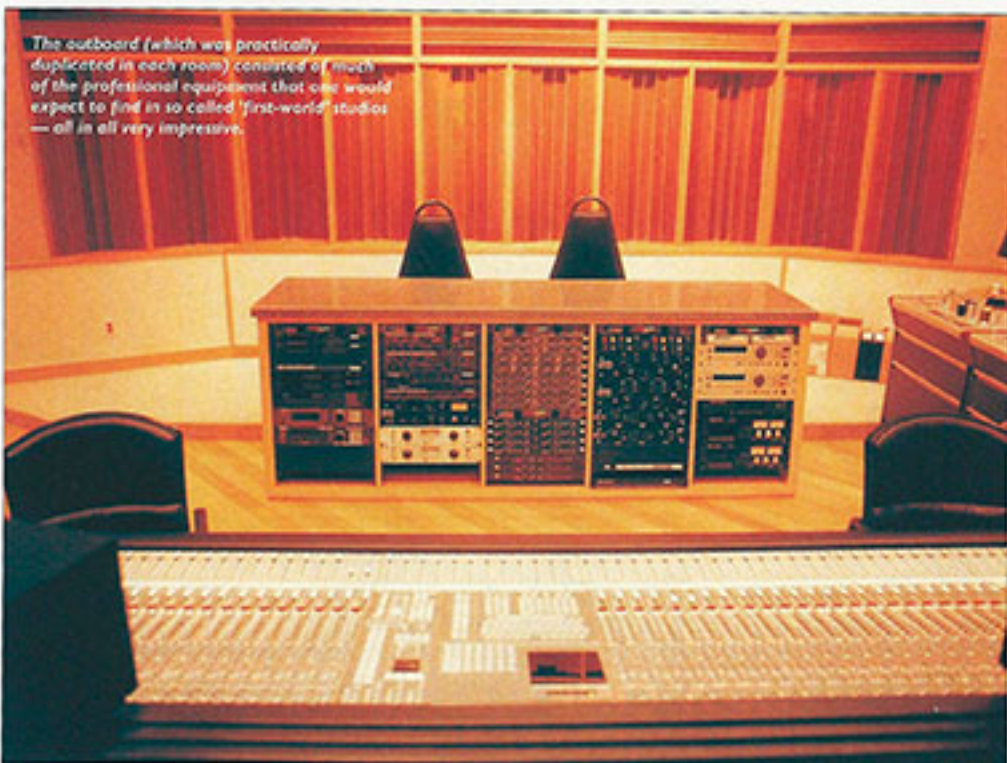
processors as well as two Urei 1176s; a Focusrite Red 3 and Amek 9098 single-channel mic pre-amps; TC Electronic 2290s, M5000s and

Philippe Neve again: "Since opening our doors last year we have had consistently high bookings in both the studios, with Studio Two

"Mega Estudios was named 'Mega' not because of its size but because of the millions (the literal meaning of 'mega') of facilities they offer. The studios are spread over several floors in the existing building and are interconnected with an extraordinary elevator system, each floor of which has brushed stainless steel doors reminiscent of a huge bank vault."

M2000s; Eventide H3000S/E and H4000 harmonizers; Panasonic SV3700 DATs and Tascam 232 cassette decks — all in all very impressive.

(SSL 4064) booked out four months in advance. Part of the reason we have gone to so much effort and expense — buying these top-of-the-line consoles — is that our national artists had, in the past, always had to go to the United States for these kind of facilities. Now they can come here instead. Not only that, but we can now attract international acts and producers to come to Brazil because our rates are very competitive compared with New York or Los Angeles."



The outboard (which was practically duplicated in each room) consisted of much of the professional equipment that one would expect to find in so-called 'first-world' studios — all in all very impressive.

Horacio Malvicino Design

The entire Mega Estudios complex was designed by Miami-based company Acoustic Integrated Design Inc., headed by Horacio Malvicino. Horacio who happened to be in Brazil during my visit to oversee the completion of the first building of Mega Estudios, and to put forward his ideas for the second stage of the building (which commenced on June 30) has made quite a name for himself in South America as a designer of first-class facilities.

Horacio told me that, despite having designed studios all over North America, he felt at home here in the South, even if the methods of construction and finishing left him a touch baffled: "I have been down here to Brazil many, many times now. The job at Mega Estudios is a massive undertaking and is going to be occupying me for the best part of the next two years I would imagine. ►



► Yamaha NS10s, a Panasonic and Sony DAT machine, various CDs and a Minidisc, a couple of drummer dynamics units and a Yamaha Rev 5 reverb. More outboard is planned for the future but, for now, the thing that struck me the most was the talkback button in the master section of the SSL SL 8056 GB that is directly connected to the TV studio director; SSL had this especially screened for TV Globo — it reads VOICE OF GOD!

Projac

A 25-mile drive south of the centre of Rio is the second site of the TV Globo empire, Projac. This two-phase project has been designed to incorporate every need of an independent television production facility in one enclosed area. All the studios, dubbing studios, production facilities, audio recording studios, a scene-building plant, outside broadcast transport storage areas, costume production buildings and, of course, administration buildings, are on a site that currently covers roughly half a square mile.

The current phase, which was only completed in October 1996, has four studios, each of which is 1000 square meters. The entire Projac site currently employs 2000 to 2500 people, set to rise to 5000 employees by the time phase two is completed in 1998. A staggering US\$250 million has already been invested in the Projac site alone, with an additional US\$106 million set aside for phase two.

Inside the Projac facility, which is guarded and protected with the very latest computer

controlled electronic access systems, you are faced with up to several miles of walking to get from studio to studio and the various sets which are built on-site and located at the rear of the main buildings. To get around, then, most people use electric golf-cart-like buggies — which was great fun.

Inside the main studio complex I was introduced to Carlos Ronconi, Audio Assessor for the entire TV Globo organisation and considered to be something of an audio guru by many Brazilian audio professionals. He is known as Dr. Goodsound within the Projac facility and also happens to be the Head of AES Brazil: "Projac has been designed to absorb and to put into practice the latest communications technologies such as digital and advanced TV. It is, if you like, a dream factory for television programmes that this country — and, of course, others — thrive on.

"I am an audio consultant for the entire TV Globo organisation and, as such, am responsible for assessing audio developments for our studios, dubbing theatres, outside broadcast facilities and the like, so I have to be broadly aware of all the developments that are going on in the audio world in order to report to the TV Globo organisation. We invested in two SSL ScreenSounds five years ago which are used exclusively for the International Department to recreate from scratch the MTE track for the telenovelas for export, including extensive music editing. One of the ScreenSounds is used in a Foley, effects and music recording/editing room, with the other one in the mixing room. SoundNet, the networking system from SSL, ties it all together and enables us to do off-line back-up and move the work from room to room.

"We invested in the ScreenSounds because, at the time, they were the best option for TV Globo — a tried and tested system that could easily integrate with our resources and our engineering staff. We have relied heavily on them since they arrived with these rooms working around the clock for six days a week, producing all manner of television programmes although mostly, of course, we work on the telenovelas. Currently TV Globo has the number one soap in Brazil which is shown every night at 9pm and is watched by nearly half the people in the country.



Carlos Ronconi, Audio Assessor for the entire TV Globo organisation and considered to be something of an audio guru.

"This means that we have to get it right every time, there is no margin for error or breakdown with the system — and, so far, it hasn't let us down. In fact, we have managed to save 30 to 40 percent on work time thanks to the ScreenSounds. The ScreenSound is a very reliable tool for us here."

This opinion was seconded by Ney Simões da Costa, International Division Manager, who is responsible for the overseeing of the department which has the ScreenSounds and which produces the television programmes that TV Globo sell around the world: "Despite the fact that none of our engineers had worked with a ScreenSound before they were installed, we found that, after the initial SSL training sessions were completed, we all took to working with the system very quickly. It is an extremely simple and reliable system to work with and has really been punished by us here at TV Globo as we drive these two units around the clock.

"We have very little margin, if any at all, for a breakdown but thankfully, despite the MO and Exabyte drives getting a bit old and worn now, we have had few, if any, problems with either system and I am very pleased with them."

Soap Sets — Projac Backlot

As I was shown around the sets of the various soap operas being filmed on the backlot at Projac, I realised that here was a production facility to rival any in the world. Having spent some time, as I have, at both Pinewood Studios and Elstree Studios in England, and having been on the lots of Fox and Universal studios in Los Angeles — all of which are responsible for film as well as television (and consequently have larger budgets) — it became very apparent that Projac is very well situated and equipped indeed.

By pure coincidence, the soap that they happened to be producing on the afternoon that I arrived is set in a village called 'Greenville' — based on a totally English background, right down to the red telephone boxes! Filming had just stopped when I arrived, and the crews were preparing for the evening shots — waiting for the sun to set. The building constructions themselves rival any I have seen in England or Hollywood with detail of the highest calibre.

The main action indoors in Greenville seems to take place around an 'English' pub with most of the actors meeting there at very regular intervals in the series. Nearly all the microphones that I saw being used were Sennheisers, a variety that included K6s, MD441s & MD421s; there were also the odd ElectroVoice RE20 and

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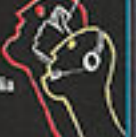
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BUILDING BRIDGES INTO THE FUTURE

BUSINESS IN BRAZIL

"I was really keen to get the design aspects of this place just right and it has taken a long time and a lot of effort on my part to get just the right feel to this place, but I believe that it has been worth it. The rooms all have independent air conditioning units which vary from three-ton units to ten-ton units in the big rooms. The windows at the back of the rooms posed a particular problem because not only are they dreadful for soundproofing but, of course, they let a lot of heat and light into the area. So I designed these screens with draw-back across the glass to enclose the room, keep out heat, and soundproof the room at the same time.

"As we are in Brazil, we used a lot of wood. There were particular problems associated with that. You would imagine that the wood itself would be quite easy to get hold of and, indeed, choosing the right woods — even the rarer ones — was surprisingly easy to do: unlike working in somewhere like Los Angeles or New York, for example, where there are certain restrictions on importing rare woods.

"The problem, would you believe it, was the level of craftsmanship among the carpenters themselves! I have had all types of problems explaining to them that the floorboards, for example, must fit together accurately — that there must be no gaps between the boards. For some reason they find this a hard concept to grasp — that it is so important to the look and feel of a facility like this to get things like that right."

Even though they only opened their doors just over a year ago, Mega Estudios have already attracted some of the premiere acts in Brazil, including renowned artists like Lulu Santos, Marina, Marisa Monte, Carlinhos Brown, Fernanda Abreu Milton Nascimento and producers such as Russ Titelman and Liminha. Several of the records that have been recorded and mixed there have already sold platinum and, with the post production and multimedia facilities now fully operational, the

The set of the Telenovela — 'Greenville', based on an English theme, built on the back lot of TV Globo Projac.



likelihood of more success is guaranteed.

TV Globo And The Need For Soap

With a population of 150 million, Brazil has, potentially, a very large television audience which can, if won-over with the right programming, offer an advertiser enormous returns on their investment. For this reason television in Brazil is very big business. In fact the largest communication company, Globo, not only offers



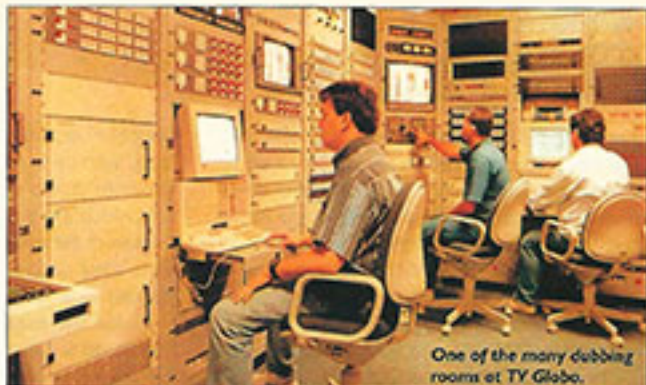
TV Globo 'Projac' facility.

television programmes, but newspapers and radio as well. TV Globo, the division that deals with the production of television programmes, is the third largest television production company in the world after CBS and NBC, and is a testimony to the avid Brazilian audiences that devour 'telenovelas', or soap operas.

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These situation dramas run hourly, day and night, with varying degrees of loyalty from the populous. The premiere telenovela, broadcast at 9pm, commands an audience in excess of 75 million every night of the week. CBS and NBC would fall all over themselves to get ratings like that! Moreover, such is the degree of intense loyalty that these story lines generate, that the entire country can be whipped into a frenzy of anguish, excitement, sorrow or joy based entirely on the daily saga of the soap actors or actresses.

TV Globo are not the only television company



One of the many dubbing rooms at TV Globo.

producing soaps in Brazil, they are just the largest. From what I saw on TV, everybody seems to be producing a soap opera and, when a story line in a particularly well-liked soap comes to an end, the entire nation goes into mourning for the loss of a dear friend!

Producing The Telenovelas

The TV Globo facility is quite enormous. There are two sites: one in Ipanema at the Jardim Botânica (Botanical Gardens), with the other, Teatro Fenix ('The Station'), three blocks away. Outside the city itself, a newer network production centre, called Projac, is some 25 miles to the south in an area known as Jacarepagua. The Ipanema site was built in the 1960s and used to be an island of buildings on the edge of the (then) quite small suburb of Rio. Since those days the city has grown up around TV Globo and the facility now sits amid a sprawl of modern everyday congested city life.

Nevertheless, it is here that much of the filming of the most popular of TV Globo's programmes is done, including the continent's most lively variety show *Domingão do Faustão* and children's Saturday shows hosted by Brazil's most popular (and wealthiest) artist Xuxa (pronounced 'Shoosha').

The production centre at the Teatro Fenix site has a large main studio area, the control room for which has just undergone a massive redesign, completed in an amazingly short six-week period between December 1996 and January 1997. The audio rooms at the control centre were also designed by Horacio Malvicino and now boast facilities among the very best for television in Brazil. The audio feeds from the studio — and there may be as many as 96 of them at any one time — are routed into two small (I would even say cramped) audio control rooms adjacent to the main video control room. In these are found two further SSL consoles, an SL 8040 GB and an SL 8056 GB, each of which are the most customized desks of their type yet, both constructed by SSL.

When you see the size of the studio that this small audio control centre serves, you begin to realise, as I did, the miracle of organisation and building that enabled the entire operation to be up and running again — without a hitch (so far) — in just six weeks. The control room is still sparsely fitted out with outboard, having only a set of Tannoy monitors and the ubiquitous