Get ready to rock — make your desktop a home recording studio!

PC Recording Studios FOR DUMMIES®

Jeff Strong
Author of Home Recording For Musicians For Dummies

A Reference for the Rest of Us!®

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About the Author

Jeff Strong is the author of *Home Recording for Musicians For Dummies* as well as *Pro Tools All-in-One Desk Reference For Dummies* and is President of the REI Institute, a MusicMedicine research organization and therapy provider. Jeff graduated from the Percussion Institute of Technology at the Musician's Institute in Los Angeles in 1983, and has either worked in or owned a recording studio since 1985. Every week, he records dozens of custom-client CDs by using the kinds of audio recording software covered in these pages. He has also released eight commercially available CDs, four of which can be found at www.reiinstitute.com.

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Introduction

As computers have gotten more powerful, they've become the standard tools for recording, editing, and mixing audio. More and more professional studios are using them because of their power — and more and more amateurs are using them because they're also relatively inexpensive and easy to use.

For many people — especially any technophobic musicians out there (you know who you are) — the thought of recording on a computer is daunting. You have to deal with hardware issue (what kind of computer do I get?) and software issue (how do I work this #@*% thing?). Add to this the sometimes-complicated workings of the non-audio computer software and you get a deer-in-the-headlights look from otherwise intelligent, articulate people.

Well, I hear ya. I don't consider myself a techy (although I fear I might be turning into one), and getting up-to-speed when it came to recording into a computer left me scratching my head a few times. Luckily for you, I've stopped scratching my head and have managed to make some semblance of sense out of the whole thing.

About This Book

PC Recording Studios For Dummies is an introduction into the world of computer-based audio recording. This book takes the mystery (and frustration) out of recording into a computer. You discover tips to help you make the process of recording music easy and the final product sound as good as possible.

PC Recording Studios For Dummies gets you going quickly so that you can spend your valuable time recording music — not tweaking your computer settings.

Here's a quick rundown of what you can find in this book:

- You discover the basic components of a computer-based recording studio.
- You find out what hardware and software you need.
- You get hands-on steps guiding you through the computer-based recording process.
- You explore the many powerful add-ons that you can use to take basic tracks and turn them into the music you hear in your head.
- You discover free (or really cheap) software that you can use to create your next masterpiece.

The best thing about this book is that you get all this information without the brain-numbing technical jargon and posturing that you find in so many computer-related books. After all, the computer should be a tool that you use to create your art, not an obstacle to it.

Not-So-Foolish Assumptions

As much as I hate to admit this, I made some assumptions about you, the reader, when I wrote this book. Actually, I think you'll be glad I did. First, I assumed you want to record audio into a computer (hence the title: *PC Recording Studios For Dummies*) and I assumed that you aren't a techy but you know the basics about using a computer, such as how to use a mouse, load software, and other rudimentary skills. I also assumed that you have some basic idea of how music is recorded. (If you don't have any idea about what the music-recording process entails, you might want to check out one of my other recording books: *Home Recording For Musicians For Dummies* — that is, if you haven't already read it.)

Aside from these very basic assumptions, I don't assume that you've ever used a computer to record music before or that you even play any musical instrument. If you're a musician, I don't assume that you make a specific type of music. Whether you're making music from the sounds of whales mating or you're composing the next top-ten smash hit, the info in this book is equally relevant. I also assume that when I say "electric bass" you know I'm not referring to a plastic fish singing "Take Me to the River."

How This Book Is Organized

PC Recording Studios For Dummies is organized so that you can find the information that you want quickly and easily. Each part contains chapters that cover a specific aspect of the computer recording process.

Part I: Computer Recording Basics

Part I covers the basics of computer-based recording. Chapter 1 introduces you to the individual components of a computer studio and explains what everything is for. Chapter 2 shows you how to set up a system so that it is easy to work with and sounds good. You also look into how you can set up your studio to sound as good as possible without having to spend a fortune on acoustical treatments.

Part II: Choosing and Installing Computer Hardware

Part II gets into gear talk. Here I focus on the hardware you need to have around if you want to record into your computer. Chapter 3 explores the core of your system: the computer itself. This chapter covers both Mac and Windows systems and shows you what to look for when buying or upgrading your computer. Chapter 4 examines the audio-based hardware you need, such as the audio and MIDI interface and other components that get the sound in and out of the digital domain. Chapter 5 walks you through the process of getting all this hardware hooked up and running properly.

Part III: Choosing and Installing Recording Software

Part III digs into the software that you need if you want to record audio inside your computer. Chapter 6 explains the different functions of audio and MIDI recording programs so you can decide what features you need for your system. Chapter 7 gives you a look into some of the most popular programs used for recording, editing, and mixing your music. Chapter 8 guides you through the process of installing your software into your computer. I cover both Windows XP and Mac OS X. This chapter gives you the settings you need to get you up and running, and you find tips to keep your system stable.

Part IV: Revving Up the Recording Process

Part IV kicks your recording process into high gear. Chapter 9 covers the basics of getting a decent sound from the source and making sure that it stays decent as it enters your computer. Chapter 10 focuses on the specifics of recording and editing audio, and Chapter 11 keys into this same process with recording and editing MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface). Chapter 12 looks at working with loops (short musical snippets that you can use to compose your songs), and Chapter 13 digs into recording with software instruments called soft-synths. Chapter 14 gives you information on mixing and mastering all your tracks within your computer.

Part V: Playing with Plug-Ins

Part V explores the role of plug-ins (software processors that you “plug in” to your instrument tracks) in computer-based recording. Plug-ins are one of the most versatile tools for recording in a computer, and you need to understand them so that you can use them effectively. So, Chapter 15 introduces you to these powerful tools and shows you the basics of using them in your songs. Chapter 16 looks at equalizer plug-ins, which you can use to sculpt the frequencies of your tracks. Chapter 17 examines the process of adding effects — such as reverb and delay — to your recordings. Chapter 18 demystifies dynamics processors and shows you how to use them to add that certain *je ne sais quoi* to the sound of your music.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

A staple of every *For Dummies* book, this Part of Tens contains some chapters to help you along the way. This section contains three chapters: Chapter 19 offers tips to improve the performance of your system and keep it running smoothly. Chapter 20 points you to some Internet resources that I've found to be helpful for rounding out my computer recording knowledge. Chapter 21 lists free (or really cheap) software that you can use when you record.

Icons Used in This Book

As with all *For Dummies* books, I use a few icons to highlight certain information that I feel is especially valuable.

Certain techniques are very important or can come in handy on a regular basis. This icon gives you gentle nudges to put these foremost in your mind.

Throughout the book, I include technical background on certain subjects that isn't necessary but can be useful if you like to know the techier side of things. This icon shows up so that you know to shift mental gears for some dense information.

This icon highlights expert advice and ideas that can help you to produce better recordings.

This icon lets you know when making a wrong move could damage your equipment, your ears, or your song.

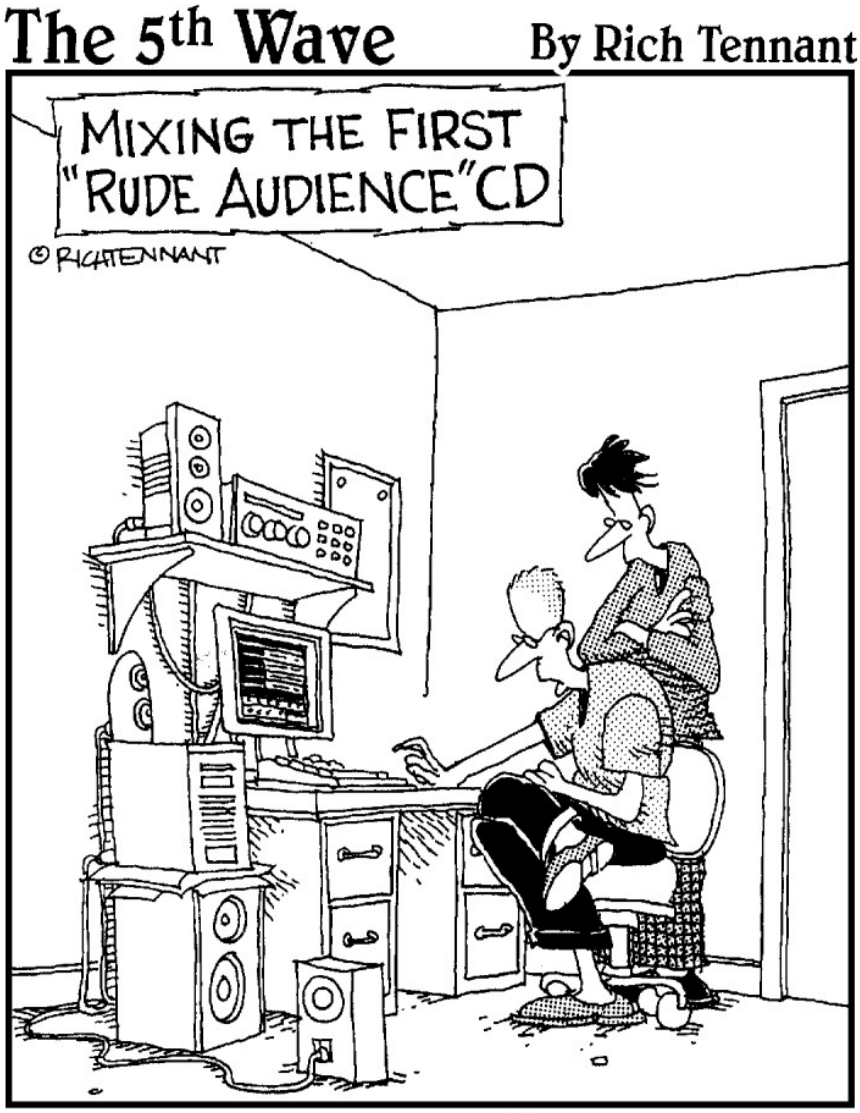
Where to Go from Here

I set up this book so that you can either read it cover to cover or jump around and read only those parts that interest you at the time. For instance, if you're getting ready to buy a computer to record on, check out Chapter 3. If you already have a computer and want to know what software to buy, jump to Chapters 6 and 7. If you've set up your hardware and software and you want to see how to add effects to your song, go to Chapter 18.

For the most part, starting at Chapter 1 gets you up to speed on this whole computer-based audio thing and helps you understand where to start down this road.

Part I

Computer Recording Basics



"I laid down a general shuffling sound, over dubbed with periodic coughing, some muted talking files, and an awesome ringing cell phone loop."

In this part . . .