

Jazzscene watches Eddie Wied and friends make an album

# Anatomy of a studio recording session

By Michael Brewin

**P**rodigious jazz pianist Eddie Wied has been telling me about one of his former piano students, Giovanni Ceccarelli, for almost 10 years.

In the 1980s Giovanni was a high school exchange student in Portland and studied jazz with Eddie throughout his stay in the United States.

Since then, the two have kept in touch and Eddie and his wife, Patricia, have visited Giovanni in central Italy several times, with Eddie conducting master classes, doing some gigs, and even recording a trio album on his last trip to Umbria.

Over the past decade, Giovanni has become an excellent professional musician, in his own right, too.

Last December at dinner one evening Eddie told me that Giovanni would be coming to America again to record a CD with him, which would feature their two pianos in various settings with other musicians.

In the course of our conversation, I agreed to play guitar on a couple of tunes and Eddie said he'd play on my album, too, and then I temporarily put the matter on the back-burner of my cranial memory banks.

At the beginning of 1997, I got a phone call from Eddie asking me to help put together some equipment to record the rehearsals for the CD. Shortly thereafter, Giovanni arrived from Italy with another musician-friend, saxophonist Lorenzo Fontana. It took several days for them to get over the jet lag from their trip.

**A**s it turned out, Lorenzo had brought over his flute -- but, alas, no saxophone. Since everyone wanted a sax on a couple of the tunes, I began looking around town for an instrument to rent for him.

Unfortunately, the stores would not rent their new professional horns, and the only horns available were terribly beat-up student models. I finally prevailed on another friend, *Jazzscene* editor Wayne Thompson, to let Lorenzo use his nice German tenor sax -- the black and gold Julius Keilwerth model -- for the sessions.

Meanwhile, Eddie had already gotten a Roland HP-330 electric piano for Giovanni to play at the rehearsals at his house (Eddie also has a Baldwin grand piano).

Eddie, Giovanni, and Lorenzo spent the next few days fine-tuning the arrangements and rehearsing their parts. I recorded some of it, and showed Eddie a few things about the audio equipment. As I looked over the charts, it was



Eddie Wied and his protégé, Giovanni Ceccarelli, make pianos sing their praises on their latest CD

readily apparent that they were quite involved; in fact, there was a lot for everyone to digest musically in a short space of time before the recording sessions.

## The Rehearsal on D-Day Minus One (Jan. 21)

The day before we were to go into Sound Impressions studios, a rehearsal was scheduled with the rhythm section which would be on the recording, drummer Ron Steen and bassist Frank Dela Rosa.

Eddie mentioned to me that he hadn't been able to reach the record producer I recommended to him for the recording sessions the next day. "Oh, no!" I thought. [You

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# Miking ideas came from Joe Henderson's Grammy albums

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really shouldn't go into a studio without a producer who is familiar with the musicians and the musical arrangements, or without knowing exactly what you're doing in there. You can waste a lot of time, spend a bunch of money, and come out with something that won't be very satisfactory, at all; it happens to musicians all the time.]

**A**fter some discussion, I finally assured Eddie that he needn't worry; even though this was at the last possible moment (and I had some other business to attend to), I would personally produce the sessions for him and even do the mix-down myself. (I was already helping him anyway, and I've been professionally involved with recording for 25 years, beginning with projects at Roulette Records and MCA studios in New York). Eddie and I went over a few private business details, he promised he'd make sure that I received proper credit as the producer of the recording sessions, and I thereupon agreed to do my utmost to produce the best possible recording for him and Giovanni. (I knew this was going to end up taking a lot of my time and energy.)

I spent that afternoon getting a very rough mix of the music with the few microphones we had onto a DAT [digital audio tape] machine, in order to get a better sense of how to approach the actual recording on each composition with this instrumentation in the studio. Afterwards, Eddie, Giovanni, and I briefly went over some music which I would play, too.

Eddie also wanted to record everything direct to a single stereo DAT tape. On the surface, this seemed like a reasonable idea; however, if everything in the audio mix and the musicians' parts weren't totally acceptable, then

there would really be no reasonable way to remix or fix anything, after the fact. That would be taking a big risk, especially considering that Giovanni and Lorenzo flew all the way over from Italy to record for just two days. I suggested, instead, that we use Sound Impressions' 24-track Otari analog machine as an initial backup source (as insurance), which could also be used as the master source tape for remixing purposes (which I felt certain would be the case, anyway). Phoning Sound Impressions, I then arranged for a good deal on some 2-inch tape reels. The other musicians prepared to go to bed.

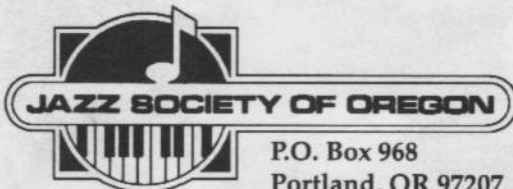
But, now, I still had a lot of work to do that night -- and other pressing personal concerns that weighed on me, mentally and emotionally. My son had a serious heart condition, and he had just taken a plane to Seattle to undergo a heart operation the following morning.

Nevertheless, I went home and mapped out the sessions late into the night. I listened critically to the technical aspects of a few of the best jazz piano recordings of recent years, including some with Keith Jarrett's trio on the ECM label. I also checked out tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson's Grammy award-winning CDs. These reference CDs gave me some ideas for miking the instruments, equalizing each instrument's tone, and determining the approximate recording levels. However, our first day's session would be rather idiosyncratic; there would be two grand pianos playing simultaneously in the same room with the bass, drums, and sax. This posed some challenges which are not typical of most jazz sessions. Accordingly, I charted out how all the instruments and mikes would be placed to best complement each other in the overall mix, the stereo imaging (e.g. left-center-right panning), and which signal processing (if any) to use, etc..

## Day One of the Recording Sessions (Jan 22)

As I drove to the session the next morning (January 22), I prayed all the way for my son's well-being. Arriving an hour earlier than the musicians who would play that day, I arranged with Nick Kellogg, our engineer, the setup of the instruments, the microphone selection from among the studio's stock, the mike placements, the signal path to the DAT machine and the Otari analog machine, the compression and Lexicon digital reverb settings for various

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# Giovanni played a Steinway, while Wied chose the Yamaha

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instruments, the setup on the recording console, the panning of each instrument, and the procedures we would use for such things as cueing the musicians, conserving the expensive 2-inch analog tape, and monitoring the decibel levels (and headroom) on the DAT machine, etc.. Then I drew up some track sheets.

**G**radually, the musicians began to arrive. We had to make some tonal modifications (using parametric equalization) to balance the two grand pianos (a Yamaha and a Steinway). Yamahas are generally favored in recording studios, because of their clarity. However, the Steinway which was brought in especially for these sessions had a warmer, darker sound. After a momentary reflection, Eddie graciously deferred to Giovanni's request to play the Steinway. Eddie's attack on the keys was also different from Giovanni's; I would have to make continuous adjustments for this factor, too, throughout the sessions.

Although Ron only wanted a couple of overhead mikes on his drums (he's a cymbal man, by preference), Nick and I thought it best to mike his entire set, as I had originally planned. Later, this would afford me a lot of audio flexibility in a mixdown for the CD. On Frank's bass we used a warm mike near the treble f-hole, another mike for string ambience, and a direct line out of his amplifier. We ran the f-hole mike hottest, since it provided the woodiest and most natural tone.

Each piano had two condenser mikes placed strategically over the harp. We used a U87 on Lorenzo's sax into an API preamp, the Lexicon reverb, and some compression. While the musicians rehearsed their parts and made alterations on the charts, we got the recording levels.

In the control room, we were definitely ready to roll some tape; I was hoping we could cover all six ensemble tunes that day, and record the more intimate numbers on the 23rd. We began with Carmela's Waltz, Eddie's new composition.

After a tentative first take, they nailed it on the second attempt; everyone played well. The next tune, Liza, sounded absolutely great and really swung into a nice groove on the third take. Although Nick and I were recording each complete take stereo onto DAT, I only saved the analog takes which, by consensus, sounded best, in order to conserve space on the expensive 2-inch tape reels.

**A**s we began recording Invitation, I sensed some tension out in the room. Ron and Frank were concerned about being professionally responsible for their evening gigs (since this would probably be a long session day). We took a short break while they made contingency arrangements on the phone with their respective bandmates. Then we tried some takes of Invitation, all at a blistering and furious tempo. But something indefinable was lacking, however. Then it dawned on me (when my own stomach growled); these guys were all hungry and needed nourishment. I suggested we take a lunch break with no dissension.

After a hearty lunch, we headed back into the studio.

I had brought a Minolta 35mm camera, and took some photos of everyone for the CD. By now, my son's operation was over. I desperately wanted to call the Seattle hospital to check on his status, but I was concerned that if I got a bad report, I wouldn't be able to focus properly on the session and, perhaps, not even be able to finish what I promised Eddie I would do.

So I resolved to hang tough and wait until the session was over that evening; there wasn't anything I could do about it, anyway, from 180 miles away in Portland.

The afternoon went very smoothly, indeed; Here's that Rainy Day and Miles Davis' So Near, So Far were hot on the first takes (Lorenzo's sax soared on the latter), and the expressive Canzone per Ferruccio, with just a trio of Giovanni, Ron, and Frank, was a joyful success by the second try. Then we tried the uptempo Invitation again -- this time, yes! The day's session was complete before six o'clock; Eddie and Giovanni's playing worked quite successfully together, Ron's drumming had been outstanding all day, and in addition to providing able accompaniment, Frank contributed some gorgeous bass solos.

After discussing the next day's arrangements with Nick, I hurried home to check on my son's condition. Thankfully, he was fine. I looked briefly at the guitar chart for a ballad, Passione, plotted out the four remaining tracks, and went to bed.



*Jazzscene's Michael Brewin not only produced and mixed Eddie Wied's new album, he also his played guitar on it*

## Mixing the selected tracks took patience

# Day 2: Wied, Giovanni tackle a complex piano/flute chart

### Day Two of the Sessions (Jan. 23)

Arriving again well before the other musicians the following morning, I set up my amp, guitar, and the direct lines out and went into the control room to let Nick know what we would be doing that day. We began with *Passione*, which is a classic Neapolitan song, set to a slow jazz arrangement by Giovanni. The rubato section at the beginning was great, but the tune didn't gell right afterwards, when the slow tempo started.

Instead of erasing the very pretty introduction, I had us restart together on the tail end of the last beat of the measure before the head (with a two measure cue). When it came time for my guitar solo, I was feeling humble and grateful to God that my son was alive and well; the result was a simple, heartfelt passion, rather than a display of chops. Eddie and Giovanni also played some nice, emotive sections. We had evoked the spirit of the piece; we kept it.

Switching back to the control room, I woke up Lorenzo, who was asleep on the couch -- jet lag still lingered. Although we eventually ended up not using the next track, we spent a chunk of time trying to get a satisfactory take of a complex flute-piano chart. Then we switched to two piano duo numbers, the standards *Come Rain or Come Shine* and *Yesterday*. Eddie and Giovanni had to pause and spend considerable time rehearsing the arrangements, so that their chords and parts would complement each other well. I glanced at the clock about every five minutes, hoping we could continue soon.

By the middle of the afternoon, Eddie was getting visibly tired -- and we were running out of the big analog tape. Since Nick and I were now only using four of the 24 tracks on the Otari machine for each take, we got clever and recorded additional takes at the same counter locations on the empty tracks. *Come Rain or Come Shine* required two passes this way, but *Yesterdays* was obviously a winner right away; Eddie and Giovanni's piano playing was truly simpatico. We even had some of the tape reel to spare. "Finito," I exulted.

After giving Giovanni a cassette dub of the rough mix, we all bade each other *fond arrivedercis* and gave each other warm hugs, because Giovanni and Lorenzo would be leaving for New York the next day, before heading back to Rome. After consulting with Eddie, I informed the studio that he and I would return in a couple of weeks, so that I could do a mixdown of the tapes for the CD.

During the next two weeks, I listened to the tapes time and again, and took notes. Eddie and I met a couple of times at my own recording studio to listen to the DAT tapes, discuss the sequencing and sound, and Giovanni also phoned me from New York, apparently to give me some input - but the phone cut off in the middle of our conversation, so he ended up sending Eddie a fax later from Italy. By the time we received Giovanni's fax, Eddie and I had already come to some of the same conclusions. In retrospect, it was a good thing that we also had the sessions on 24-track analog tape, because in one or two spots

the Panasonic's DAT peak levels were just a little too hot (some digital distortion/clipping), and the mix needed a bit of fine-tuning (even though it sounded pretty good overall). As I had foreseen, I knew (even before day one) that Eddie and Giovanni would listen to the cassette dubs and hear some things they would like to revise, edit, and omit, etc.. That's standard operating procedure in this business.

### Mixing Down the Selected Tracks, Feb. 17-19

I called and set up two days of mixing at Sound Impressions for February 17th and 19th. At the appointed time, armed with a briefcase full of notes, I picked up Eddie and drove him to the studio. With Nick manning the tape machines and the automator, I sat at the console and began mixing each tune.

I spent about an hour on each selection, working on each aspect of the tracks until I got some improved levels, equalization, stereo imaging (panning), reverb settings, and so forth. For each take that we would use on the CD, I also wrote down any counter cue points -- for tweaking the knobs and bringing the faders up and down (which I had to do a lot -- very subtly - with the pianos, sax, and guitar) as we recorded to a DAT master mix. Again, as anticipated, the drum sound was virtually all cymbals and some snare; using the other drum channels, I gave a gentle boost to the kick drum, tom toms, hi-hat, snare, and added a little room reverb to the snare to blend better with the pianos. I also changed the parametric *eq* point for the snare to bring out its natural frequency range.

I changed the equalization on the two Yamaha piano channels to take off some of the trebly edge, and I added a touch of digital reverb to both pianos on the non-ensemble tracks to convey a feeling of warmth and room ambience. Because of the wide variance of Giovanni's and Eddie's keyboard attack, I had to pay special attention to the fader levels at every moment of each tune, making necessary adjustments to keep a good balance between them and ensure that melodies and solos were as clear and unobscured as reasonably possible, without bringing them up too far.

We found some amplifier noise on *Passione*, so I asked Nick to erase all the spaces on the analog tape where the guitar wasn't actually playing; because we had to raise the top of Giovanni's Steinway to get the more open sound he wanted, the piano mikes naturally picked up a faint trace of it, too. I also changed the equalization on the guitar to place less emphasis on the pick attack and, using Pro Tools computer software, Nick deleted the brief and barely audible sound of an open G string resonating against an F# note at the end of the tune.

I didn't change much on the bass sound, and the sax just needed some minor adjustments with the reverb, levels, and parametric equalization. Because the console is horizontal and its faders are not sealed, however, dust had accumulated inside some of the mechanisms, creating discernible noise when the faders were moved on some chan-

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## After 65-plus hours, the studio session ended

# Wied, Brewin return to studio to record, mix one final tune

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nels. Due to this problem, we rehearsed the fader cue points and desired levels on some of the tracks and then ran all the console gain control movements from the automator.

Although Giovanni wasn't satisfied with the playing on the original version of Come Rain or Come Shine and wanted to scrap the tune entirely, I remixed it anyway and did some judicious editing, and Eddie seemed pleased with the result.

**B**y now, it seemed the recording aspect of the CD project was almost complete. However, in reviewing the tapes, I noticed that while we had several tunes which essentially featured only Giovanni's piano, there weren't any tunes where just Eddie's playing was featured. To balance the collaborative album, both Giovanni and I felt Eddie should add another number. So, Eddie agreed to go back into the studio and record one more tune. We had to wait a couple more weeks (until March 17th), because Eddie wanted some time to select and work on the music, and I had reconstructive knee surgery on March 7th and wasn't at all mobile or pain-free (or even functional) for at least a week. I set up the session with the studio in advance, and a few days beforehand Eddie decided to call the bassist, Frank Dela Rosa, back in, as well. Eddie chose an old Victor Young/Bing Crosby number, Ghost of a Chance. Since I had originally agreed to play on two songs, the night before the session, Eddie and I decided that I should try to play on the tune, too. I hadn't played any guitar in two weeks, and I wasn't sure if I could even play with my left leg up and my body twisted sideways to the right. But, heck, I'd give it a shot; if I couldn't play, I'd just limp behind the console again.

### **We Record and Mix a Final Tune (March 17)**

Eddie picked me up in his vintage BMW and, half-way down the freeway to the studio, he pulled out a chart of the song (which I had never heard before). I tried sight-singing it in the car, and the changes didn't seem to pose a problem; it was a straightforward tune.

We pulled up to the studio, unpacked, and I set up my gear in the control room, running the stereo guitar signal straight into the console from my pedalboard to get a clean sound. We waited awhile until Frank arrived, and then we ran through the chart of the tune, with me playing the guitar while reclining on the couch. Eddie put on some headphones, but Frank doesn't like to use them, which meant that he couldn't hear me play. For my part, I could hear them through the monitors in the control room. Then Eddie came in and wrote 25 additional chord changes on my chart. Now things suddenly looked a bit more interesting, especially for my improvised guitar solo; I had to get more alert - coffee, please! After a quick gulp, I had Nick cue up the Otari to yet another location on the last 2-inch analog tape reel which had sufficient unused track space, and, after

reconfiguring the console channels, we began recording. We listened briefly to part of the first complete take, then scrubbed it, confident of better things to come. Eddie made a couple more modifications to the arrangement. After the second take, Eddie and Frank looked pretty satisfied. "That's it!" said Eddie. While he and I listened to the playback, Frank packed up his gear to go to his next appointment, said goodbye, and left.

I shifted into a comfortable chair at the console and began mixing the tune. There wasn't as much to do on this one; I didn't change a thing on the instruments, tonally speaking. All I did was reset the panning, adjust the bass and guitar volumes, add a hint of reverb to the piano, and bring the piano slightly up and down in the faders at critical counter points in the tune. I had kept the guitar chordal comping fairly low anyway, in order to keep out of the way of the piano. I rehearsed this with Nick at the tape machines and, after recording it twice to the DAT, we had the natural-sounding mix I wanted. "Perfect!" said Eddie.

**N**ow, all that remained was for us to sequence the tunes, space them, and run off a couple of production master DAT tapes for the CD. Based on the success of Ghost of a Chance, I made a final revision to the song sequence list, gave it to Nick, and he transferred my master mix of each tune from DAT onto the computer, put the songs into the correct sequence on Pro Tools, cropped the selections right at their beginnings and endings, and added the five-second spacing I requested between each tune. We previewed all the beginnings and endings, Nick set the computer to automatically copy the finished product onto a DAT tape in real time, and the three of us headed out for Chinese food.

Reviewing the tape later that evening, I realized that the overall volume levels on Ghost were almost two decibels lower than on some adjacent tracks, so the next afternoon I asked Nick to add 1.5 db's to Ghost on Pro Tools before dubbing digitally to the DATs that would be used to master to the CDs. At long last, after 65+ hours (I stopped counting), my role as this international project's American recording session producer and mixer was almost complete (save for composing some liner notes).

That's basically the background story of how this CD recording came together and an in-depth, behind-the-scenes look at some of the methods I use to produce and record legit jazz sessions nowadays. Ultimately, we hope you will enjoy this CD immensely yourselves. I think it sounds wonderful! As they say in Italy, "Chi la dura la vince." (Perseverance brings success.) Dall'Oregon con amore!

© Michael Brewin 1997

★★ Ω ★★

*Editor's Note: Michael Brewin is a producer, guitarist-composer, college educator, and writer. He has worked with leading world-class musicians, jazz and otherwise. This particular jazz CD will be released on Philology Records, probably in the late summer of 1997. Brewin's next project is a guitar album.*

# Michael Brewin produces, mixes, plays on Wied's new CD

done all of **Tom Grant's** albums, as well as **Gino Vanelli's** current and upcoming discs. Lee's project was recorded at Vanelli's studio, INKA. After the Storm was put in heavy rotation at KJZ and KMHD soon after it was released a year ago. **Wayne Thompson** said in his review of April '96, "Lee's solo piano playing on four tracks is superb and his writing talent is evident throughout..."

Also be sure to check out the new CD from alto sax player, Warren Rand, his first as leader, entitled: Dameron II-V, a tribute to the late, esteemed bebop pianist and composer, Tadd Dameron. The disc also features pianists **Randy Porter** and **Dave Frishberg**, trumpet player, **Paul Mazzio**, bassist, **Leroy Vinnegar**, and drummer, **Mel Brown**. It is available on Rand's own label, Aspen Grove Records, P.O. Box 241, Dundee, OR, 97115, for \$14.00.

Jazzscene writer and producer/guitarist **Michael Brewin** recently completed production on a straight-ahead jazz CD for pianists **Eddie, The Professor, Wied**, and **Giovanni Ceccarelli**, a former student who now lives in Perugia, Italy. Ceccarelli studied with Wied while an exchange student at Cleveland High School 10 years ago, and has continued his playing back home in Italy. Wied goes to Italy to conduct master classes and to visit and perform with former students annually.

Wied studied music at Lewis and Clark College and The Juilliard School of Music and holds an Art Degree from the University of Nevada. He worked for fifteen years in Las Vegas, and has performed with artists such as **Richie Cole, Bobby Hutcherson, Herb Ellis, Anita O'Day, Sheila Jordan, Nancy King**, and **Honi Cole**, just to name a few. He currently teaches at Reed College, and performs regularly with the **Art Abrams Swing Machine**.

Italian record magnate, **Paolo Piangiarelli**, liked the early tapes he heard of the sessions so much that he offered the musi-

cians a record deal on Philology Records. Other stellar jazz artists on the Philology label include saxophonists **Phil Woods** and **Lee Konitz**, trumpeters **Enrico Rava** and the late **Chet Baker**, pianist **Enrico Pieranuzi**, and clarinetist **Tony Scott**. Philology also owns previously unpublished recordings of **Charlie Parker** and **Clifford Brown**.

Wied and Ceccarelli play two grand pianos in tandem and separately on the disc along with drummer **Ron Steen**, bassist **Frank Dela Rosa** who used to work with pianist **Tommy Flanagan**, saxophonist **Lorenzo Fontana**, and guitarist **Brewin**, who has worked with **Mose Allison**, Beatle **John Lennon**, and members of **Steely Dan** and **Miles Davis'** groups. Jazzscene's editor **Wayne Thompson** loaned Fontana his black-and-gold Julius Keilwerth tenor saxophone, which Lorenzo used on the album. Ceccarelli and Fontana work together in a number of bands in Italy. The album is slated for a late summer release and will be distributed throughout Europe and the United States. Brewin describes the recording session in this month's *Jazzscene* cover story, "Anatomy of a studio recording session."

Last but not least, we are pleased to welcome bassist **Glen Moore** back to Portland after his two and a half years in New York. He has a new recording called *Dragonetti's Dream* "which evolved from a series of short pieces improvised as introductions to poetry readings." The multifaceted Moore was a member of **Oregon**, and has played and recorded with our own **Nancy King**. Just before returning to the Rose City, he toured Athens, Greece; Istanbul, Turkey, and Montreal with million-selling Canadian pop-Celtic singer **Lorena McKinnit** in a diverse ensemble that included harp, aurelian pipes, keyboards, guitar, an oud and lute player, and an Egyptian drummer.

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