

TASCAM's Portacapture X8 used by Warren Bowman & Scott Larson



Capturing live performances accurately is one of the most demanding tasks for any recording engineer. Achieving balance among the performers while accurately capturing the energy that is unique to live performances is an ongoing challenge. To help address these issues, engineers Scott Larson and Warren Bowman have found success with the Portacapture X8 32-bit float point multitrack handheld recorder from TASCAM.

Larson started live audio engineering in 1975 for Epic / CBS Records artist The Boyzz from Illinois, a Chicago band with a distinct Southern Rock feel. Additionally, he spent several years working in entertainment technology, event production and systems integration with db Sound, Clair Brothers and OSA. These days, he can be found live mixing One of the Boyzz, a spin-off musical endeavor headed by Dan Buck of the original namesake group. Larson's associate, Warren Bowman, has been an audio engineer for DeLuxury plus numerous bands while also working for American aerospace developer and manufacturer Blue Origin as a Rocket Engine Test and Development Engineer before retiring. Together, they are a formidable team. Larson discussed their experience with the TASCAM Portacapture X8.

"We purchased the Portacapture X8 in April of this year," Larson reports, "and since

then we have become very fond of it. We use the Portacapture X8 for capturing One of the Boyzz - a six-piece band - using the mixing board audio feed and 4 microphones. The mixer has 24 tracks, and we add minimal reverb and delay to the mix. The X8's onboard mics are used for channels 1 and 2, the live board stereo mix goes to channels 3 and 4, and we use 2 more mics in channels 5 and 6, spread fairly far apart at the console."

"We run the X8's audio file output through an analog console in the studio after setting the X8 outputs and pans," Larson explained. "This enables us to make slight EQ adjustments and add effects. The output of the console is run concurrently through a line level to digital converter and is stored on a PC as a high-quality WAV file. The WAV master is converted into an MP3 file, and individual tracks are separated and saved. From there, we add a small amount of compression, after which the track is normalized and fade ins and outs are inserted for the final product. This method also maintains a very high-quality recording throughout the process, and delivers the same audio quality to a CD, flash drive, or for file transfer."

When queried about those Portacapture X8 attributes that he finds most appealing, Bowman offered the following, "For us, portability is a huge plus. I can carry all the recording equipment under my arm, and I'm ready to record in just a few minutes. This, combined with the X8's rich feature set make the unit perfect for our manner of working. There are several presets that are optimized for Podcast, Field, Voice recording and more - all of which optimize the recorder for various types of applications. We primarily use the Manual mode, which lets us configure the recorder to our preferences. The unit is capable of very high-fidelity recording - sometimes more than we need - so we know we will get the best results possible for any project we use it on."

Bowman elaborated on his experience with the Portacapture X8's Manual Mode. "I use the Manual mode (32-bit float at 192 kHz WAV) almost exclusively, as it gives me the greatest control over all the I/O parameters and recording settings. It also has a very nice selection of effects, and the compression and gates are easy to use and sound very natural. I especially like the Parametric EQ section, which provides an incredible amount of control over the EQ."

Larson discussed the challenges he typically encounters in his work and how the Portacapture X8 helps him address them. "The hardest part of recording a live, loud, rock band is that the board mix usually turns up the softer inputs like vocals and tends to mix the louder guitars and other amplified stage gear at a lower volume. This results in a vocal heavy mix, without a lot of the drive provided by the stage instruments. The extra mics, 4 in our case, greatly help reduce these differences by mixing in what the audience actually hears. The result is a live mix that sounds very close to the real thing, and that is what we have been striving for."

With many musical and audio electronic products, questions arise. Hence, responsive and capable support is crucial. Here too, Larson was quite enthusiastic

about his TASCAM experience, "Customer service, technical support, and Artist Relations have been top notch! They have answered all our questions and we hope to provide feedback for future updates."

Before shifting his focus back to the business of the day, Bowman offered these parting thoughts, "The Portacapture X8 has enabled us to record live shows with ease, and with very consistent results. It has settings for just about any recording situation, and the versatility is truly amazing. Once set up, I can sit back and enjoy the show!"

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