

Music

Palms studio
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at the Studio is actually long-term record projects.

The Dragons have five days in the studio, which is shorter than a long-term project, but just enough time to record their seven new songs. That is, if they work efficiently.

“What we like about this band is that they work hard and are really prepared when they come into the studio,” Thrall says of the classically trained musicians who each play multiple instruments. “Those are the things I want to tell local artists that they need to do.”

Back in the control room, Dragons’ producer Brandon Darner listens to the band play, turns up the volume on Andrew Tolman’s drums and comments to Mark Gray, the Studio’s in-house sound engineer, that they should speed them up a bit. Darner is pushing the band to shake off the solemn recording vibe and instead produce an organic, natural performance. Bassist Ben McKee hopes that with Darner’s help, “This next group of songs [are] more close to what a live Imagine Dragons performance is—on an album.”

Few local bands record at the Studio at the Palms because it costs about \$1,500 a day. But the Studio does support the local arts scene. In addition to the annual recording of the Las Vegas Academy’s big band, Thrall handpicks local artists “to help them get into a studio of this caliber.” Imagine Dragons were selected to record in the Studio.

When I’ve nearly memorized “Tokyo,” the music stops and the Dragons cram into the control room to decide which track they like best. Sprawled on random flat surfaces (one has even joined me on the couch), the musicians retreat to their inner world while listening to imperceptibly different versions of the same song. Their faces are all so serious, but I’m having fun, enjoying their energetic mix of synth-pop and powerful lyrics. Although the Dragons aren’t sure if they’ll turn these songs into an album, the recordings are still crucial for the year-and-a-half-old band. McKee says it’s the “best group of songs so far ... potential for breakthrough ... lots of buzz. Some ears [who are] receptive to what we are doing are offering help to get them done.”

After a few hours it’s hard to fathom that there’s a casino full of slot machines clanging below. Perhaps that’s why the



Imagine Dragons’ Dan Reynolds sings in the isolated sound booth.

Las Vegas location doesn’t actually distract artists. “Once the artists are in here, they camp out,” Thrall says. “And the other distractions they usually have—like managers and record producers popping in—they don’t have because we are isolated from the music industry. But when they finish at 4 a.m., they can still go get a great meal and the streets aren’t dead—no other city has that to offer.”

Five hours have passed and I’m exhausted, but the Dragons have a long night ahead of them. Closing the control room door behind me, I can still hear the muted sound of the band. And as I walk out, I admire a corner where the wall has been autographed by famous musicians. Lady Gaga signed one wall as “Government Hooker.” Katy Perry signed “a.k.a. Kitty Purry.” Wayne Newton wrote around the fire detector that he’s “on Fire.” And the first to sign one of the walls, Celine Dion, drew a giant pair of lips. I marvel at how many hours of hard, repetitive work each signature represents.

Back on the casino floor, the everyday noise of life is shocking. I stare toward the Fantasy Tower and can’t imagine that somewhere up there is a floating studio. ■

Imagine Dragons perform live with White Rabbits and Interpol at The Joint at the Hard Rock at 9 p.m. Oct. 22. \$25.50-\$29. Their new music will be available at ImagineDragonsMusic.com by the time of their Oct. 22 show, and will be available on iTunes at a later date.

Hardware Store

The Studio at the Palms has won the prestigious *Mix Magazine* Tech Award for Outstanding Studio Design, but the music that’s recorded there has also gone on to win awards. Here’s a sampling:

GRAMMY-WINNING ALBUMS/SONGS:

Best Rap Album: Eminem, *Relapse*.

Best Contemporary R&B Album: Mary J. Blige, *Growing Pains*.

Best Pop Performance by a Duo or a Group: Maroon 5, “Makes Me Wonder.”

Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album: Tony Bennett, *Duets: An American Classic*.

PLATINUM SALES:

The Killers, *Sam’s Town*, multi-platinum.

Maroon 5, *It Won’t Be Soon Before Long*, multi-platinum.

Tony Bennett, *Duets: An American Classic*, platinum.

Timbaland, *Shock Value*, platinum.

Celine Dion, *Taking Chances*, platinum.

Journey, *Revelation*, multi-platinum.

Gun’s N’ Roses, *Chinese Democracy*, platinum.

Jamie Foxx, *Intuition*, platinum.

Eminem, *Relapse*, platinum.

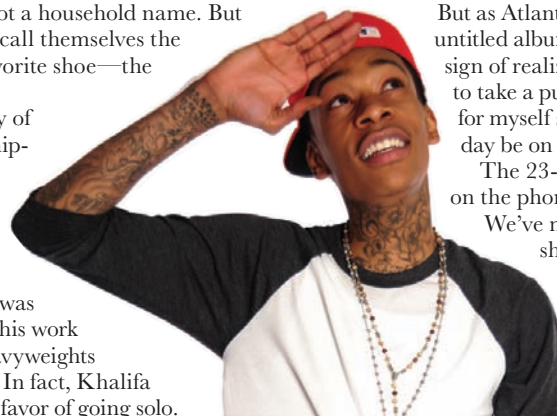
Hippie Hip-Hop

Young rapper Wiz Khalifa enjoys peace, love and herbal pleasures

By Andreas Hale

Pittsburgh rapper Wiz Khalifa is not a household name. But his fans are so passionate that they call themselves the “Taylor Gang” (named after his favorite shoe—the Converse Chuck Taylors).

The (self-proclaimed) Bob Marley of Hip-Hop’s music can be coined as hippie hip-hop. His songs embody partying, women and weed. Examples of those themes include 2007’s hit single “Say Yeah” and his recent “Kush and Orange Juice” mixtape, which trended on Twitter the day it was released. Since he debuted in 2005, his work has been recognized by hip-hop heavyweights Drake, Snoop Dogg and Rick Ross. In fact, Khalifa turned down touring with Drake in favor of going solo.



But as Atlantic Records’ newest signee prepares his as-yet-untitled album, he knows that making it on his own is the true sign of realizing his dream. “Like I always say,” Khalifa pauses to take a pull from his herbal pleasures. “I got to keep it going for myself so people will continue to respect it and I can one day be on the same level as a Rick Ross or a Snoop Dogg.”

The 23-year-old paused after a show in Detroit to talk on the phone about his tour. “Every show has been sold out. We’ve made sure that everyone who comes out to the show leaves happy. Everyone participates, so it’s all fun. No fighting and no violence.

“Just expect hella energy,” he says, regarding his stage show. “It’s Taylor Gang mania.” ■

House of Blues at Mandalay Bay, 6:30 p.m. doors, Oct. 24, \$27, all ages