



Support Your Budding Star

Home Studios Help Develop Talent

By Joel Samberg

Of all the proverbs uttered by parents, the one most despised by a particular segment of the younger generation goes something like this: "Listen, kid — just make sure you have something to fall back on!"

This particular segment is composed of the boys and girls who want to grow up to be dancers, musicians or filmmakers — the Astaires, Streisands and Spielbergs of tomorrow.

When admonished to have something to fall back on, some kids take it as a sign of parental skepticism, which isn't always true. Many parents support the artistic interests of their children, as long as talent accompanies those interests. But parents beware: those of you who put your support front and center may one day hear something like this: "Mom? Dad? Can we build a studio right here in the house?"

How far are you willing to go? Every parent will have some tough decisions to face. Is this one of the tougher ones?

"It's important for young people to have a way to discover just how deeply they want to get involved in any activity.

And they won't know until they try," says Gary Alt, a financial advisor in Sussex who is also an active independent musician with an in-home studio his children use.

Richard Kretchmer, owner of Rainbow Video in Morristown, has been asked by many parents about the pros and cons of having a home production studio. As long as the space is available and the parents are willing to make the investment, it's not a bad idea, he says. "Besides, it's a lot better than having them play video games or texting all day long," he quips.

ON POINTE

Of the three artistic disciplines just mentioned, dance is the one where in-home studios meet the most resistance, particularly from instructors. Most advise against it.

"It is best for a child to train in a studio with an instructor," says Paul McRae, assistant artistic director at New Jersey Ballet in Livingston. "In fact, without the correct

floor, more harm than good can be done by having a private dance space."

"A home studio can never take the place of a professional teacher," echoes Melissa Roxey, cofounder of Mill Street Ballet School in Lambertville. "Supervision is important. We can't see ourselves when we're dancing — because we're dancing!"

However, considering the number of manufacturers that offer products and accessories for home dance studios, the idea is not without precedent. Harlequin, headquartered in Moorestown, is one of them.

"We developed the home studio [a do-it-yourself kit] to provide a way for dancers to easily incorporate dance into their everyday lives," notes Pat Basileo, vice president and general manager. "The system affords dancers the proper vehicle for practice so they can improve their techniques and build their confidence."

Harlequin sells roll-out wood slat floors that can be laid on any existing surface, including carpet. They also sell portable barres (the horizontal wooden poles dancers hold onto for support) and glass-free mirrors that are lightweight and shatterproof. Kit prices range from \$300 to \$900.

McCrae at New Jersey Ballet points out that ceiling heights are a major consideration for a home dance studio. They need to be higher than nine feet for clearance when dancers jump

or get lifted by another dancer. Not every home can accommodate that.

There are many other companies, including O'Mara Sprung Floors which sells all kinds of installable dance floors, and Alva, which offers floors, barres and mirrors. A single freestanding barre starts at \$200 and a 6x2-foot mirror panel at \$350. Prices go up from there. All told, be prepared to spend anywhere between \$850 and \$2,000 for a home studio that will have your young dancer leaping for a future spotlight. Just make sure the ceiling is high enough.

THAT'LL BE THE DAY

According to the movie "The Buddy Holly Story," Buddy Holly and the Crickets made a record in the Holly family garage using a simple reel-to-reel tape recorder. And look how that turned out for them!

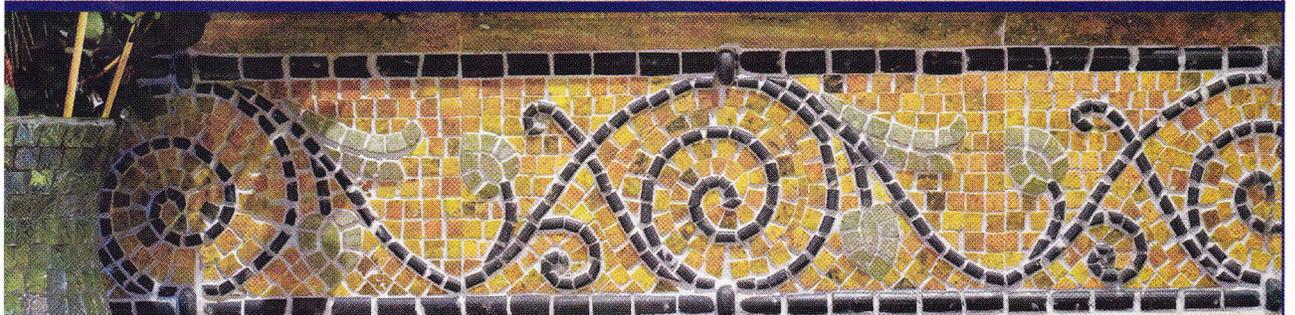
Although most garages are large enough to accommodate a band, they won't eliminate ambient outside noise. For practicing that may be fine; for recording, less so. Plus, practicing in a garage can be rough during a winter like the one we're having. Cold temperatures aren't good for instruments. So parents should let their own little crickets inside during the winter. Basements or large family rooms are fine. Even here, however, experts warn to be wary of vents, radiators, telephones —



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and other people in the house. Many songs have to be re-recorded when someone opens the door to shout, "Hey, where'd you put the remote?" It happens to every home-based musician.

For recording, the setup can be as simple as a single digital recorder: the 21st-century version of what the Crickets used. Music editing can be done almost anywhere in the house, because these days it's easier than ever with computer software.

"It's really not too expensive to get started with some basic equipment, and anything that helps foster a strong interest in music should be encouraged in the home," says Alt, who has recorded several CDs in his home studio that are sold on CDBaby.com and iTunes.

"Today we really need to go no farther than the local mall," adds audio industry executive Marc Feingold of Marlborough. "Apple has apps like GarageBand for home recording. So just going to the Apple store can kick off your home studio."

Apple promotes GarageBand as a software suite that turns a Mac into a complete recording studio, and they're not exaggerating. With it, mistakes can be corrected, multiple instruments can be synchronized, special effects can be added, and much more. The software even has piano and guitar lessons.

Other computer software allows young musicians to record multiple tracks, overdub voices and instruments, and edit and mix recorded tracks into lush, sophisticated compositions. In this respect, musical kids today are luckier than their predecessors.

"Recording is part musical ability and part technical know-how. They might come from two separate parts of the brain but both are part of the creative process," explains Alt, who has helped other parents design their own home studios. "The trick is to provide a good way to let your kids explore their musical ability so they can decide if they want to master the technical side. It can lead to many years of musical enjoyment."

In addition to Apple, manufacturers of equipment and accessories for recording and editing music include Sweetwater, Musician's Friend and Tascam. Most have

detailed catalogs and websites where you can begin your research. Many music-store employees also are knowledgeable about home studios. If you're buying only software, you may not need to spend much more than \$40. For those purchasing separate recording and mixing equipment, the tab could be several thousand dollars.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

For the most part, future filmmakers need only the smallest cubicle or closet for their digital video studio. The reason is that most production will be done on location — in other words, outside in fields, playgrounds, parks, woods and anyplace else that lends itself to creative filmmaking. Of course, many a domestic drama or comedy will have to be shot in a real room in a real house. Hey, parents — live with it! George Lucas didn't become George Lucas by being chased out of his house.

The cubicles and closets would be used for editing and post-production. Post-production for videographers and filmmakers is comparable to what music people do after a song is recorded. Elements are added and shots are taken out or modified so the end result will be what the young artist has in mind.

"Let them develop their creativity," Kretzmer advises. "With today's equipment, anyone can be creative and share it on YouTube or Facebook." In other words, kids can have an instant worldwide audience for their work, all from the comfort of their cubicle.

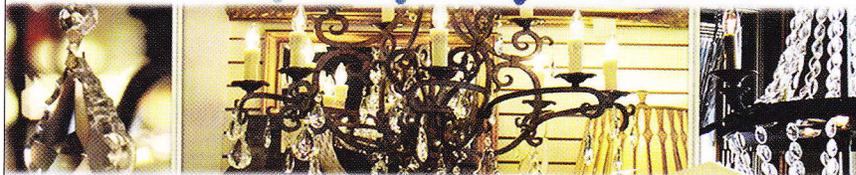
For home-video production, Apple comes back into the picture. The company offers various software products for video production and moviemaking, such as iMovie and Final Cut Express. Editing effects such as panning and swiping, sound integration and posting onto the web are some of the functions available. For PCs, Sony has Vegas software for both beginners and professionals. Software can start as low as \$45 and go up to \$600. And since most youngsters already have them, computers don't have to be counted in the total studio cost.

Once these young auteurs learn how to tell a good visual story by combining skillful dialogue with effective shooting, they may want to graduate to sophisticated digital cameras,



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