

# You Are Now Leaving Utica

## Musician Builds Dream Studio in Upstate, NY

by Janice Brown

UTICA, NY—J.A. Castle may not be the first recording studio built inside a church, but it certainly is the first in Utica, NY. It just so happened that when musician/composer Jeff Avalier relocated to Utica from northern California, and scoured the area for available real estate for his recording studio, a 1920's era church was the standout location on the market.

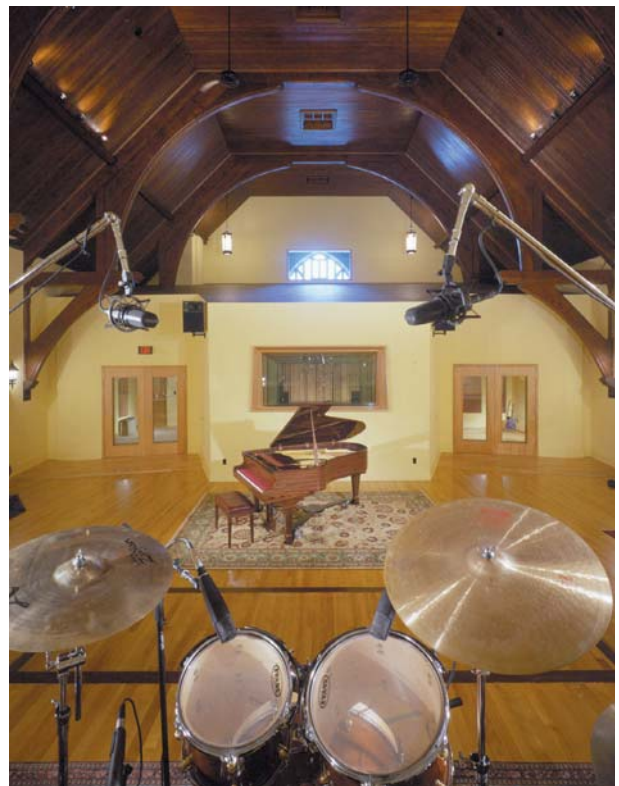
"I had never seen a church for sale before," Avalier points out. "The inside of the place was just demolished, it looked like a bomb had gone off in here. But, you could tell even then—the room was just magnificent." In fact, the building had to be repaired as if a bomb had gone off inside; once the sale was finalized, Avalier had not only the studio design and build out to incur, but also a building restoration. Three years later, in October 2003, J.A. Castle Studios opened for business.

Crowned by the original 35-foot-high wooden ceiling and flying buttresses, J.A. Castle's 1,600-square-foot live room will be an ideal setting for string ensembles and choirs, according to Avalier, who hopes to record film scores in the new facility. Having contracted John Storyk to design the studio, he's confident the room makes the grade. "John figured out that the live room has a 2

1/2-second delay on it," says Avalier. "The bass just drops right off. After spending so much time building this room, it was so gratifying when John finally came in with a microphone, and it was totally flat—the room sounds unbelievable."

Avalier chose a Yamaha DM-2000 console to control his A room, and has fully outfitted the control room with a Digidesign Pro Tools HD system, MOTU's Digital Performer, racks of outboard gear, an extensive collection of vintage tube and condenser microphones, and the Genelec 1038s/1031 surround sound monitoring array. Avalier's partner, producer/engineer Vincent Sanchez, also his partner in their smaller-scale northern California studio, and Matt Wagner are resident engineers at J.A. Castle.

While the facility's earliest customers were bluegrass and rock bands, piano-tracking projects, and a school choir, Sanchez does a lot of commercial spot work—a definite boon to the studio's business. "Vince does full-service audio and video editing for commercials," expands Avalier. "We have an Avid suite, which really opens up the market, makes us a full-service production house. We've also done a couple of independent films together, where I've scored it and he's edited."



**J.A. Castle Studios is a refurbished, John Storyk-designed 1920's church in Utica, NY.**

Located smack dab in the middle of New York state, between Albany and Syracuse, J.A. Castle could live out its days servicing aspiring and accomplished musicians living in the surrounding areas. While unlikely that a world-class room would host a strictly local clientele, Avalier seems comfortable serving his new community, while using the studio for his own projects. "You don't think of Utica, NY as a big center of culture, but there's actually a lot of soul around here," says Avalier. "Plus, we can accommodate an 80-piece orchestra in our live room. For that type of space, it's definitely less expensive than most other studios. We've already been getting calls from Rochester, Buffalo and Toronto."

J.A. Castle's Studio B has already

been a big draw for local hip-hop artists. The MIDI-based studio is equipped with Pro Tools and a Mackie control surface, and as a more affordable space, suits pre-production and small overdub sessions. Avalier's also hooked up the facility with an "awesome" lounge, with pool and ping-pong tables, a full kitchen and bar, and a weight room.

So far, the response to J.A. Castle has been fantastic, Avalier reports. "Everyone says when they come in, 'I can't believe I'm in Utica,' so I'm thinking about putting a sign above the door when you come in that says, 'You are now leaving Utica!'"

**J.A. Castle**  
[www.castlerecordingstudio.com](http://www.castlerecordingstudio.com)



**DEF CUTS:** Mos Def (pictured) worked at The Cutting Room in NYC, recording and mixing an Isley Brothers remake for Geffen Records in the SSL 9000 J-equipped Studio A. Dylan Margerum engineered the sessions.