



# HITOKUCHI-ZAKA

Zenon Schoepe discovers a studio complex in Tokyo.

One of the most peculiar aspects of recording studios in Japan is their physical location. The West is no longer surprised to discover studios in the basements of shops, in converted cinemas and churches, on farms, in a quiet mews behind a busy main road or among the warehouses of a city's industrial estate. In Japan, due to a severe shortage of space and the astronomical expense of what ever space there is, ingenuity and circumstance combines to situate studios in tall bland looking office blocks.

A step into the foyer of the building that houses Hitokuchi-Zaka Studios in Tokyo and you could be forgiven for thinking you were entering some multinational company's emporium as people in suits and tidy two-pieces pass you in the lifts and the lobby and park their umbrellas in the overcrowded parasol grids planted around the entrance now that the typhoon season has started.

Entering Hitokuchi-Zaka's floor in the building does little to lead you to suspect that you are any closer to a recording studio. The office atmosphere is one of hushed industry with carpeted corridors, tidy desks and the sound of people getting on with it. No MTV nor videos blaring out.

Finally a door opens into a pine panelled and comfortably cushioned relaxation area and from here the visitor steps into the blue and pale wood high ceilinged control room of Studio 1 — Hitokuchi-Zaka's flagship in its five studio complex. Recently refurbished with a Neve VR72 with *Flying Faders* and acoustics by Kinoshita, the aesthetics of the room with its curved slatted ceiling are unusual, pleasing and memorable.

Opened 13 years ago, around time of the independent studio explosion in Japan, Hitokuchi-Zaka is part of the Fujisankei Communications Group whose interests include record and

production companies. Fujisankei also owns the highly prestigious Kawaguchi-Ko residential studio which is blessed with an unrestricted view of Mount Fuji from the control room. The facility runs an SSL 4056E with G Series computer and is complemented by six bedrooms and various facilities that make the most of the studio's location in one of Japan's most beautiful parks.

Tokyo's Hitokuchi-Zaka studio complex represents something of a showcase in Japanese studio terms most notably because of the size and ambition of the installation bearing in mind the cost of the ground it stands on — estimated to be in the region of Y1000,000,000 (around £400,000) per 3.3 m<sup>2</sup>.

Studio 1 therefore goes out for Y45,000 (about £180) per hour excluding outboard and machines — Sony 3348 and 3324, Mitsubishi X850 and Studer A800 are available in each room — and gets it according to Hitokuchi-Zaka President Hideo Tanaka. 'Rate cutting is negligible in Japan. We're selling on responsibility and reliability.'

Originally the complex was all API equipped but the desks have since been sold or broken up for parts aside from the 'time capsule' of Studio 4 more about which later. Consequently all rooms boast racks of API EQs or built-in desk sections as in Studio 1 where a 48-channel cue mixer has been constructed from API bits with an additional solo panel with remote connection to supplement the rooms Neve desk.

The expanse of space behind the console in Studio 1 allows keyboard rigs to be wheeled in with ease and the control room plays host to an NED Synclavier 6400 system. The requirement for such a 'play area' had a strong bearing on the acoustic design of the room according to Katsuya.

Kuroda, General Manager of the complex's engineering department. 'We needed a design with very wide dispersion which could achieve a good sound well beyond the engineer position. And we have managed it.'

The control room's lack of daylight is skillfully overcome by very organic lighting which gives an airiness to the environment which is maintained in all the rooms throughout the complex even though some do benefit from natural light.

The outboard racks reflect the Japanese studio obsession with old style and particular processors: Urei 1176/8s, Tube Techs, Neve 33609s, Dbx compressors and EMT plates. Japanese engineers are used to working on digital formats and in line