

TRADE



SUCCESS STORIES

More than a Music Studio

In addition to being a recording studio, Audiostate 55 provides children the opportunity to discover music through immersive programs.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
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FOR A GUY WHO HAS STEVIE WONDER'S number in his cell phone, Dr. Henry Panion is surprisingly down to earth. Though he has arranged more than 50 songs for the famous singer, you would never know it given his humble demeanor. At his recording studio, Audiostate 55, in the up-and-coming Woodlawn neighborhood, Panion is quick to say that working with big names is not what fulfills him the most.



Dr. Panion in front of the studios

"Stevie is a good friend of mine; we've done a lot together," Panion says. "But you know what brings me the most joy? Seeing the kids we work with hit a lyric just right."

As we sit together at Audiostate, he tells me the history of the legendary place. The Audiostate 55 label is distributed internationally by the Warner Music Group, and the studio is decorated with celebrity pictures. Some of the names to grace the label are Denita Gibbs, Curtiss Glenn, Houston Kendrick, and J. A. & Tha Prez. A few well-known artists have used Audiostate 55's team of producers, engineers, and arrangers in a myriad of ways. Those artists include Ruben Studdard, The Neville Brothers, Carrie Underwood, Kirk Franklin, The Clark Sisters, Aretha Franklin, Jonathan Butler, Israel Houghton, Smokie Norful, and Chaka Khan.

Panion explains the three separate entities that make up Audiostate 55, which was started in 2006. Two of those entities include the record label/recording studio and the production company that produces live entertainment.

But it's the third one, the camps Audiostate holds for school-aged kids, where Panion's true love for what he does overflows. His mission of seeing the next generation succeed in the music industry is more than a desire—it's an obsession.

"One of the things that is significant to me is our music technology academies and camps, providing an opportunity for young people to get exposure to the industry through our pre-college music tech classes," Panion says. "Sometimes these kids don't know what it takes to be in the entertainment industry. Our goal is to show them not only the production side, but also the career and educational opportunities that exist."

Currently, about 150 elementary through high school students participate in Audiostate's programs. The high school students are able to satisfy their

fine arts requirements through the music technology courses.

The students participating in the summer camps do not pay. Audiostate 55 has a partnership with the Woodlawn Foundation that helps with the costs of maintaining the state-of-the-art, 20-station Woodlawn Music Tech Lab, as well as the hiring of teaching and lab assistants that include upper-level college music students from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Belmont University, Alabama State University, and the University of North Alabama.

Other support comes from area corporations and foundations, community and civic leaders, and national companies such as AVID—the manufacturers of

attend seminars from artists such as Beyoncé and Cee Lo Green, and study subjects such as music theory, arranging, and recording engineering.

"It's not all about dollars—we would have not chosen to be artists to get rich," Panion says. "I get rich by seeing young people's excitement and that fire that's deep inside of them being ignited. We have students who otherwise would never have gotten the chance to come into a recording studio."

I watch as Panion works with students from Ossie Ware Mitchell Middle School. He treats the students with respect and care. He listens to their music, gives sound critique, and encourages them to do better. Over the years, he has been able to guide his students through to success.

"We have two young students right now from our programs who are recipients of the Bill and Melinda Gates Scholarships. They now have a full ride all the way through to their Ph.Ds. That makes me very proud," Panion says.

It's easy to see why Audiostate 55 has become what it is: One of the best venues in Birmingham not only for recording, but also for growing young musical talent. Talent that might just blossom into the next Stevie Wonder, Ruben Studdard, or Carrie Underwood. For Panion, there is one thing

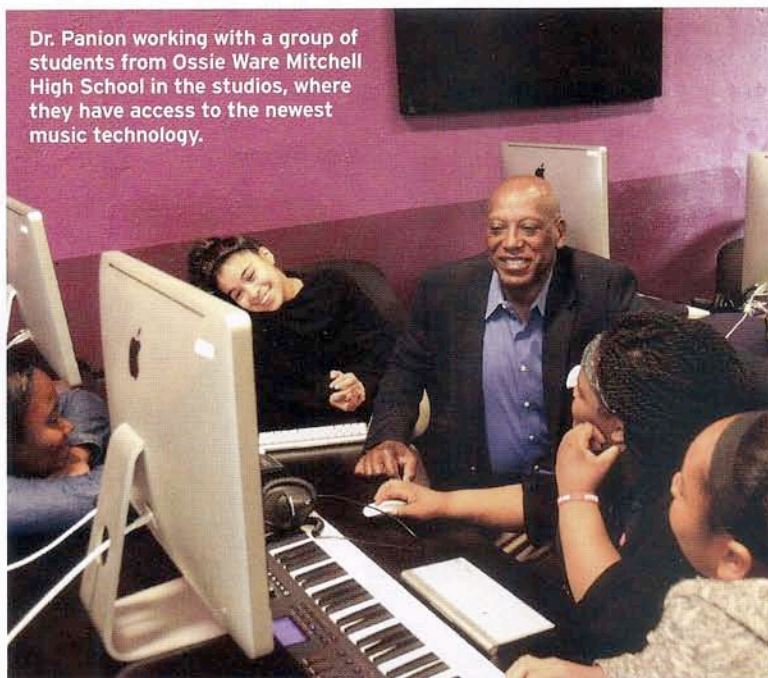
that makes his world go around.

"As an artist, I get my greatest joy when I feel people are being touched by my music. That music can provide an escape. I want people to be carried away and care about the music that we write," Dr. Panion says.

So, while he may have Stevie Wonder's number, Panion also has the numbers of all the children who come to Audiostate 55 week in and week out to record—or play or sing—and always to dream. ■

Details

Audiostate 55 Recording Studios | 4 55th Place
North | 205.592.2222 | audiostate55.com



Dr. Panion working with a group of students from Ossie Ware Mitchell High School in the studios, where they have access to the newest music technology.

Pro Tools, Media Composer, and Sibelius music and video production software. Audiostate's program was identified by the Berklee College of Music as an outstanding community music program and was adopted as part of their Berklee City Music Network. Several students from the program have been accepted to Berklee, one receiving the college's prestigious \$150,000 Presidential Scholarship. Berklee's proprietary software, PULSE (Pre-University Learning System Experience), is provided on every computer in the lab and made available for students. Through this software, students gain a unique opportunity to experience music lessons from Berklee professors,