

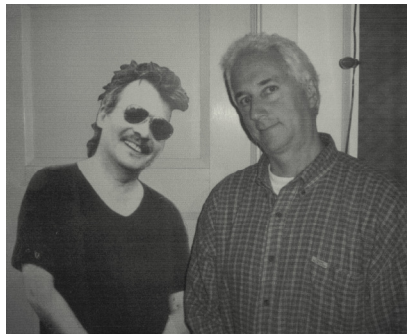
Nashville Sessions

Phil Maffetone



I first went to Nashville to visit Johnny Cash. (Previous articles on this site and elsewhere have described my professional relationship with him.) My life as a songwriter had just begun, so it was a great experience. I would fly to see Johnny every month for a week or two. While there, I got to know his long-time recording engineer David (Fergie) Ferguson, his son-in-law, country singer Jimmy Tittle, and Johnny's children.

As it would happen, I recorded my first demo there as well. (A *demo* is a recording of a song or group of songs compiled to demonstrate one's catalog of music for use by other musicians.) My very first recording session took place in December 2003. Fergie engineered and introduced me to the world of music recording. He had a studio with super-songwriter John Prine – so the energy was perfect.



Phil with John Prine – oh, that's just a lifesize photo on JP's office door!

I couldn't sing very well, and was still new at guitar and piano, but I had some good songs for a new songwriter and wanted to experience the art and science of producing my music. We had a number of really good studio musicians.

In addition, Jimmy Tittle played guitar and sang some of the songs, including *Suzannah*. My oldest daughter, Thérèse, sang lead and backup on some songs too. Her lead and vocal harmonies on *Flowers & Weeds* was perfect. It was also her first time in the studio but you'd never know it. We had a lot of fun, and I ended up with more than a dozen songs for the start of my songwriting catalog.



Setting up the studio for day one.

Among the many highlights was the honor of playing the guitar Johnny Cash used for most of his TV shows between 1969 and 1971. I recalled watching his show, and now I was playing his guitar – what magic! It was a custom made Martin D-35S with an acorn-and-leaf pattern on the fretboard (see photos above and below). The guitar's torch inlay on the headstock and the abalone-trim top was only part of its beauty – it made me play like never before. (Soon after my recording, the guitar was placed in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.)



Johnny Cash's guitar – above, tuning up; right, in the vocal room.

I ended up with some good recordings, including *Red Wine Cork* which appears on my album, *We All Need* (the album version was a later recording in LA). But it was the combination of great musicians, and great engineering and mixing that made the experience so good. Even more important was my introduction to that essential aspect of songwriting – recording the music.



Phil and vocalist Stevie Bower go over lyrics for *Oh, Bethasia* for demo two.

I returned to Nashville a few months later with more new songs for demo two. Soon afterwards, I moved to another music capital of the world, Los Angeles. (NY, LA and Nashville are considered the three music capitals, all being very different in their musical environment.) I had access to a studio there, so my other demo recordings (totaling five to date) were done there as well. It was while in LA that I decided to produce an album, and *WE ALL NEED* was born.