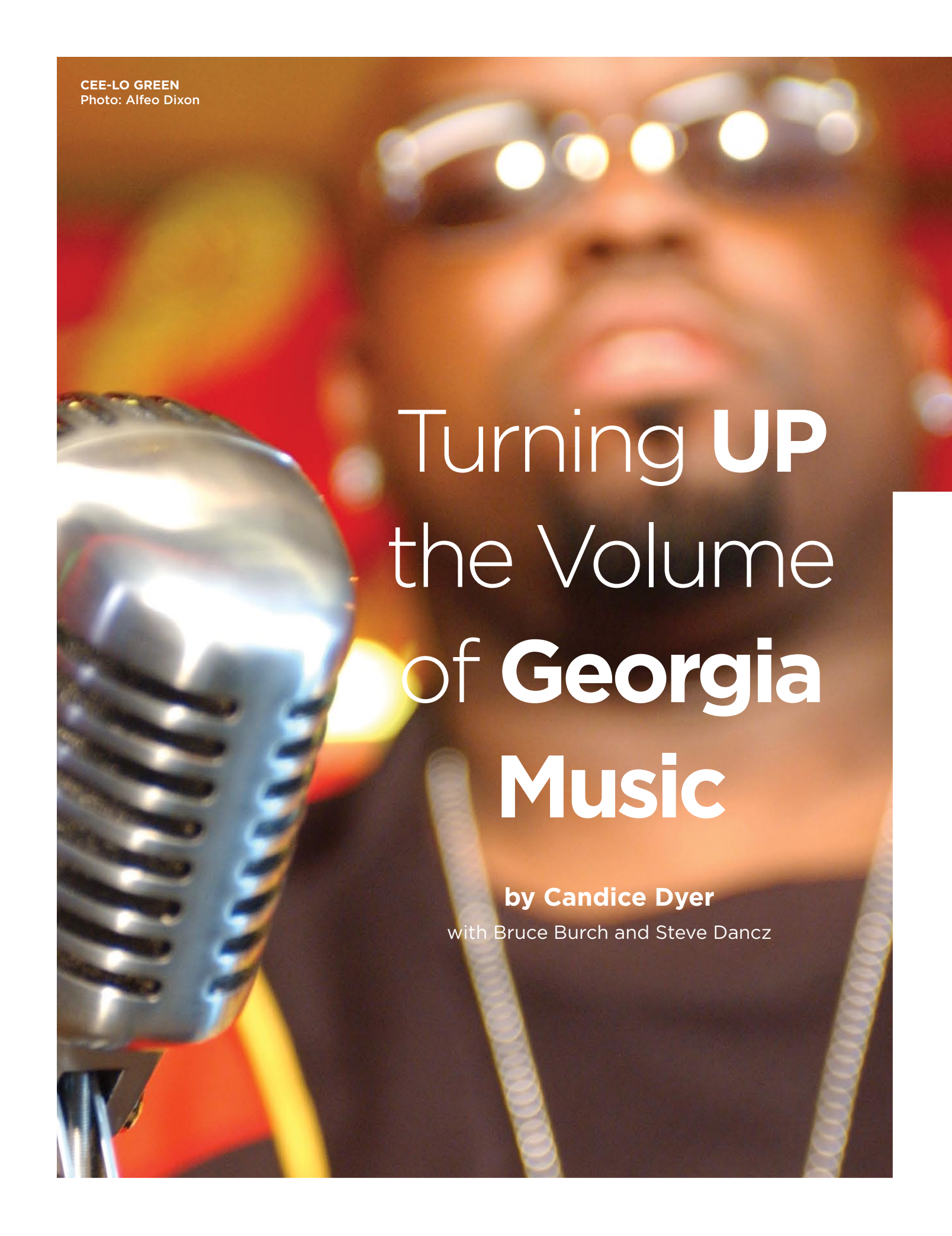


CEE-LO GREEN
Photo: Alfeo Dixon



Turning **UP** the Volume of **Georgia** **Music**

by **Candice Dyer**

with Bruce Burch and Steve Dancz

Joey Stuckey likes what he hears. "I get very excited about the rhythms of an air-conditioner or the burst of a car starting," he says. "There's beauty in the sound of an elevator."

Born with a brain tumor, Stuckey lost his sight as an infant.

"My whole world is sound," he says. As a teenager, he discovered a noise that delighted his ears: rock 'n' roll. So he learned how to read music by touching and feeling the notations his teacher had scratched into a sand-pile and, for a time, studied under jazz guitarist Stanley Jordan. Stuckey since has become an award-winning sound engineer, producer, recorder, composer, performer and musical ambassador — a "blind musician with an insightful vision," as he bills himself.

"I don't think my ears are, necessarily, magically better," says Stuckey. "The difference is that visual stimulus is so powerful that it dominates what you perceive. When I'm listening, that's all I'm doing; I'm not staring out the window at the trees the way most people do.

My head is always full of beats and melodies, and I feel a rhythmic pulse going through me at all times. That's just the way my spirit works."

Lately, Stuckey's tuning-fork of a spirit is registering some good vibrations

in Georgia's recording industry. He operates Shadow Sound Studio, which works with artists from all over the world to produce everything from the "greasy, funky licks" of Wet Willie's

Jimmy Hall to the seven-string acoustic guitar work of "Felipe" from Brazil.

"I'd say about 50 percent of my clients are from Georgia, and the others are from just about everywhere else: North Carolina, Nashville, Hawaii, England, Japan," says Stuckey, who uses, among other bells and whistles, a console once owned by Annie Lennox of Eurythmics. "At this point, I have all the equipment and expertise I need to compete with New York and L.A."

Much the same could be said for Rodney Mills Masterhouse in Duluth. Mills, an industry veteran whose career spans Patsy Cline to Ghetto Playa\$, works with about 40 artists a week, roughly half of whom are from out of state, he said.

These reports are typical of a decidedly up-tempo trend in Georgia music.

Thanks to the mobility afforded by digital innovations and other audio-visual magic, along with a growing number of high-profile sound wizards, more Georgia artists are staying home to lay tracks. And an increasing number of newcomers file in like pilgrims, guitars slung over their shoulders, to knock on our soundproof studio doors.

"Creative communities are thriving nationally and internationally in Atlanta," says Bob Judson, music futurist and head of corporate business development at Crawford Communications. "There are no more geographic barriers. The world is flat, and Atlanta can continue to grow as a technical facilitator as easily as L.A., New York, India or Singapore."

How to stoke these crackling communities will be tackled at the 2006 Atlantis Music Conference & Festival in Atlanta, in more than



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21 educational panels and speeches about most aspects of the industry, including the “new face of A&R;” the phenomenon of self-produced mix tapes; and guerilla marketing techniques using online communities such as MySpace.com and Youtube.com.

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“Every year we strive not only to offer a diverse selection of the best unsigned artists for our showcase events but also to provide an equally diverse line-up of educational panels and industry professionals sharing their thoughts on the future of the industry,”

says festival director Kathy Gates.

Postmillennial Atlanta has shed its old nickname, the “Motown of the South,” for the edgier “ATL,” capital of hip-hop’s “Dirty South,” where multitasking moguls Dallas Austin and Jermaine Dupri scout their old turf for up-and-comers to join the ranks of T.I. Harris, Ludacris, OutKast, Usher, Arrested Development, Monica and Ciara. The result is a recognizable “Atlanta sound,” marked by Southern-accented lyrics that refer to Peachtree Street and videos filmed at Waffle House.

This collegial environment has attracted the likes of Janet Jackson, Mariah Carey and Sean “Diddy” Combs, among other hip-hoperatti. Chuck D., original member of Public Enemy, also recently set up an Atlanta office and studio for his SLAMjamz label. Jamie Foxx and Destiny’s Child have taken advantage of the hospitality and authoritative professionalism of Patchwerk

Studios. The star of *Ray* also turned up at Tree Sound Studios—host to R.E.M., Will Smith, Whitney Houston, Indigo Girls, Kenny Rogers, Shawn Mullins and many others—to work with producer Sean Garrett on the title track of his debut solo album, “Unpredictable,” which featured hometown hero Ludacris. And Lionel Richie lingered here to work with engineering ace Phil Tan and songwriter/producer Sean Garrett at Silent Sound.

“We can credit the obvious successful music-makers in Atlanta for qualifying us as a legitimate music market, but we must also recognize the producers and engineers who have been working with the national recording industry elite, not just bringing the celebrated artists to town, but generating a great source of revenue for the state,” says Michele Rhea Caplinger, senior executive director of the Atlanta chapter of the National Recording Academy of Arts and Sciences (NARAS). “We have Brendan O’Brien, Dallas Austin, Jermaine Dupri, Bryan Michael Cox, Jazze Pha, Phil Tan and many more to thank for making this city a credible recording destination.”

All of this fervent collaboration is punctuated by the reassuring ka-ching of a cash register, though estimates of the state’s revenue from music vary, in numbers that are difficult to quantify but impossible to ignore. Music encompasses a sweeping variety of enterprise, such as copyright and licensing firms; music schools; entertainment law firms; festivals and concert venues; and the product sector of instruments and recording equipment, to name just a few.

The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDECD) currently lists the



economic impact of Georgia's music industry as \$1 billion, creating 11,000 jobs and generating \$54.3 million in tax revenues. A Georgia State University study puts the figure as high as \$2 billion. The state's recording and entertainment industries, including bands, orchestras and composers, produce an annual return of more than \$385 million, according to another study funded by GDEcD, while equipment manufacturers, instrument retailers and music schools generate another billion, with tax revenues estimated at \$94.7 million.

"The state's music venues, college radio, print outlets and a handful of adventurous commercial radio stations have helped nurture a

music scene that shows continued promise and growth," notes Mark Pucci, a publicist whose career dates back to the early days of Capricorn Records in Macon.

Atlanta is home to a NARAS chapter; regional bases for the "Big Four" record labels, Universal, Sony/BMG, Warner/Elektra/Atlantic and British-based EMI; and regional offices of two major performing and composition rights societies, the American Society of Authors, Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) and Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI).

"Music-wise, sound-wise, expense-wise, Atlanta makes sense," comments Charlie Brusco,

PHIL TAN
Photo: Mil Cannon



longtime music manager to legendary acts such as Lynyrd Skynyrd and Michael Bolton. “More people today are coming down here because

““Music-wise, sound-wise, expense-wise, **Atlanta makes sense**...It is an exciting time to be in **Atlanta** and part of the vast entertainment industry.””

they are attracted to all the stuff going on — more studios, more rehearsal space, and obviously the talent is here, and the diversity in music. It is an exciting time to be in Atlanta and part of the vast entertainment industry.”

Crunksters are not the only ones

living off the phat of the land. When one form of music thrives, its support system inevitably nourishes the others, so the hip-hop wave has enabled rock, country, gospel and classical enterprises to flourish in its wake. More session players are available, and businesses specializing in video production, choreography, clothing design, and hair and makeup emerge to serve the entire community.

“It wouldn’t bother me if 100 other studios opened along my street—in fact, I’d welcome them—because what each of us does is different, and the needs of each artist are different,” Stuckey says. “The more people who are involved in music, the more CDs get sold, the more concert tickets are bought, the

more other artists choose to relocate to that spot, the more we all grow. There is room for everybody.”

Other industry leaders echo that refrain.

“Our resources are not the well-kept secret they once were, and their success in attracting the music business has in turn helped grow the industry even more,” says GDEcD Commissioner Craig Lesser, noting also that a new incentive program is expected to boost development of the video industry. “We know that talent incubates talent, and we intend to keep attracting and cultivating it.”

One of these incubators is the music business program launched this year at the University of Georgia, where aspiring moguls are learning about copyrights, ring-tone licensing, movie soundtracks, publicity and promotion, production and other fundamentals.



SHAWN MULLINS

The program is directed by Steve Dancz and Bruce Burch, longtime music business pros.

Dancz worked in Los Angeles as a record producer and composer of orchestral scores for television, and Gainesville native Bruce Burch enjoyed a successful career in Nashville, where he wrote two No. 1 songs for Reba McEntire and had cuts for giants including George Jones and Faith Hill.



STEVE DANCZ, JOHN KEANE, BRUCE BURCH
Photo: Chris McKay

recently, “snap style,” heard on ring-tones wherever hipsters convene. It is defined by natural sounds such as finger snaps and whistles. “We wanted to create something real simple,” Mook-B told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, “like going

back to the days with your mama’s pots and pans and paint buckets.”

“There are major changes going on in the way business is being done in the music industry,” Dancz says. “Part of the trick is to be able to hit a moving target and that is a skill we’re helping our students develop. Obviously, Atlanta is cranking but there is a great variety of musical activity going on all over the state. Athens, Macon, Savannah, Augusta and Columbus all have strong creative scenes representing a diversity of musical styles.”

Burch adds, “At least 75 percent of the jobs in the industry are what we call ‘helpers’— the managers, accountants, A&R people and other supporting roles. The business side is at least

as important, if not more so, than the creative side.”

Columbus-native Dallas Austin usually gets credit for launching Atlanta’s first major hip-hop act in 1991 with a group called “Another Bad

Creation.” Throughout the decade that followed, Antonio “L.A.” Reid and Kenneth “Babyface” Edmonds at LaFace Records kindled the urban music scene, giving rise to new forms that today outrank the old Compton couplets in playlists: “crunk,” a beat-heavy dance sound, and, more

The creative forces of Athens, too, have jumped into this syncopated scene with deejay Danger Mouse (née Brian Burton) joining Atlanta’s Cee-Lo Green (Thomas Callaway from Goodie Mob) to develop Gnarls Barkley, a “psychedelic soul” maestro known almost as much for his inscrutable, phantom-like persona as his music. “So who is Gnarls Barkley?” asks his web site.

“The rumors fly hard in every direction and remain defiantly unverifiable.” His most recent release, “St. Elsewhere,” was recorded and mixed by Athens native Ben Allen at Maze Studios.

Meanwhile, Southern Tracks and its publishing arm, The Lowery Group, housed next to each other in north Atlanta, keep on rocking. Atlanta’s oldest music powerhouse



MONICA
Photo: Spark St. Jude / MagicOnFilm

“We know that **talent incubates talent**, and we intend to keep attracting and cultivating it.”

enjoys an august legacy carried on by intuitive young tunesmiths who set the tone, literally, for future GRAMMY® winners. Their artists get a bankable mix of old-school and new-school cool.

“Musicians like to have a certain amount of **privacy** to concentrate on the **creative process**, and they find that in **Atlanta.**”

When Bill Lowery, a country music deejay and television host, began organizing his company in the 1950s, insiders snorted at his chances of success outside Nashville or the big, bi-coastal

cities. Undeterred, he unleashed a string of hits, including “(I Never Promised You A) Rose Garden,” “Down in the Boondocks,” “Games People Play,” “Be Bop A Lula,” “I Love the Nightlife” and “Ahab the Arab.” He drew from a stable of quirky, local talent including Joe South, Jerry Reed, Ray Stevens, Tommy Roe and Billy Joe Royal.

Today, Southern Tracks producer Brendan O’Brien has grown almost as famous as the marquee-lit names he records. Known for his sensitive, guitar-driven legerdemain, O’Brien “got the sounds that were in our heads onto tape,” marvels Chris Scianni of Dangerman, in an echo of similar accolades from Pearl Jam, Stone Temple Pilots and the Black Crowes. It was primarily O’Brien’s special sensibility that lured Bruce Springsteen to Atlanta to record all of “The Rising” and part of “Devils & Dust.”

“Bruce felt very comfortable here,” says studio head Mike Clark, pointing proudly to some framed photos of The Boss mingled among the gold records on the wall. “Musicians like to have a certain amount of privacy to concentrate on the creative process, and they find that in Atlanta.”

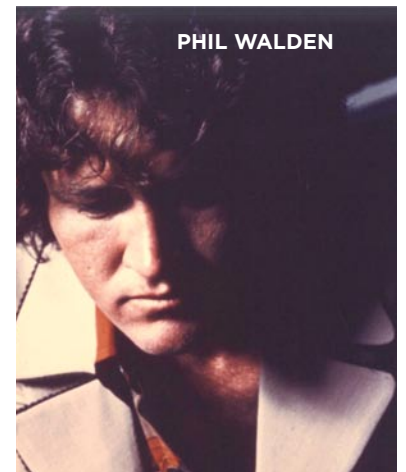
Georgians always have led the band, one way or another. Four revolutionary genres claim origins here: rock ‘n’ roll by Little Richard; funk, started by James Brown; and Southern rock, courtesy of the Allman Brothers Band, recording on Phil Walden’s Capricorn Records in Macon. Also, the first country record was made not in Nashville but in Atlanta, by “Fiddlin’ John Carson,” whose ditty “The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster’s Going to Crow” quickly sold 500,000 copies and made him a cracker-barrel celebrity in 1923.

And the beat goes on.

“In one week in May, Atlanta rapper T.I. had the No.1 single on the Billboard hip-hop chart, Atlanta singer-songwriter Jennifer Nettles of Sugarland had the No. 1 country single with Bon Jovi and Newnan’s Alan Jackson had the No. 1 gospel album,” notes Lisa Love, director of the Georgia Music Hall of Fame. “We’re exporting this music all over the world, yet people don’t associate these artists with the state of Georgia. I want to help change that.”

Love, a respected bass player and the granddaughter of country-western singer PeeWee Mills, plans to strengthen the museum’s outreach programs, relying, like others in the industry, on digital innovations and the Internet.

Bertis Downs, R.E.M. attorney and advisor, believes that there will be more opportunities for the niche artist. “The connection between creator and fan will be closer and more direct with the Internet serving as the communication channel. That process is only going to accelerate in the years ahead. Georgia has a proud history in producing top level



musical talent, in a variety of genres of music and I think the state will continue to prosper in the next few years.”



JERMAINE DUPRI
Photo: Georgia Department of
Economic Development/Cara Pastore

While Caplinger welcomes growth, all of this techie talk leaves her feeling a little wistful, she admits.

“In terms of our industry at large, will it become completely digitized?” she says. “It sure seems to be the case, but I have mixed feelings about that. I don’t think you can ever replace the tactile satisfaction of buying an album—yes, I’ll go back that far—and actually studying the artwork and reading the endless liner notes and memorizing the lyrics from what was in a legible font size.”

Other music veterans understand these sentiments, even as they upgrade their equipment. At “The Loft,” the hot incubator artist development and recording facility in Columbus, the multimillion-dollar studio is promoted as “digital-vintage.”

Stuckey, too, affirms some of the old ways.

“I use the hot new computer technology along with vintage technology,” he says. “I like the precision and functionality of computers; that fact that they are very exact is good for some things. But I think my imperfection as a human being—the fact that I’m not mathematically precise—working in the analog domain gives the recording a certain spirit, the charm of a real person finishing up the process.”

In the 1990s, Stuckey worked the board at Phoenix Sound Studios,

which “rose from the ashes,” so to speak, of the old Capricorn headquarters in Macon, and he has done some recording at the historic Douglass

Theatre, where Little Richard, James Brown and Otis Redding launched their careers.

“Georgia has a great past, an awesome, inspiring history,” he says. “But I don’t want us to get bogged down in thinking of

our music in the past tense, as glory days that are long over. We still have something very special here to offer the next generation.”

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