

Do You Hear What I Hear?

Midwest International Band & Orchestra Clinic Presentation 2015

Maximizing the artistic quality and educational value of recording your ensemble.

Sponsored by the College of Arts & Media of the University of Colorado - Denver

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A formal recording session provides a singular opportunity to capture your ensemble at its very best, and it is also a learning opportunity for students and instructors alike. Having the right personnel in charge of your session will bring out the best in everyone and transform the recording process into a capstone of your ensemble season.

For more information on this topic, please visit <http://www.facebook.com/DYHWIH>

The Conductor's Perspective

1. Artistic Leader of the recording
 - What is the purpose of this recording?
 - Educational Project, Recruitment, Artistic Statement, Archive, Promote Soloist or Composer, Raise Profile of Program
 - What is the content of the album and what is the sequence of music?
 - Depends on the answer to first question
 - Is there a centerpiece work? Build around that work.
 - Think of an album as a fine meal.
 - What is your recording philosophy?
 - Our philosophy is that we want our album to sound like a live performance.
 - The idea is that we want the mix of sound to be natural. While overdubbing allows more leeway in altering balances and bringing out individual parts, it also changes the relationship between instruments.
 - "Nothing mixes like air." Clarke Rigsby
 - Solve acoustic issues on stage, rather than in the studio, as much as possible.
 - Dealing with soloists
 - Their needs
 - The ensemble's needs
 - Editing
 - Who will make the initial road map?
 - Who will have the final say on edits?
2. Preparing the Ensemble
 - Achieving detail without sacrificing flow

- Stay aware of the big picture
 - Perform the concert the night before the recording
 - Allow the group to perform in the recording session
 - Creating confidence among the musicians
 - Consistency of performance: pitch, tempo, articulation
 - Dr. Beat
 - Retune as necessary
 - Speak the same language of articulation
 - Training for performance versus training for recording
 - Recordings are put together in segments
3. Achieving the optimal recording environment
- Appropriate amount of time
 - Keeping everyone engaged
 - Creating a positive feedback loop
 - Scheduling breaks
 - Handling unexpected circumstances
 - Working effectively with the recording team
4. Choosing the Recording Team
- Selecting your Producer(s)
 - Great ears
 - Team oriented
 - Understands player psychology
 - Committed to the project
 - Selecting your Recording Engineer
 - Needs to have an artistic sense
 - Team oriented
 - Committed to the project
 - Has the technical requirements
 - Communicating with your Recording Team
 - Giving an overview of the recording
 - Allowing other team members to have input
 - Defining roles
 - Managing time
 - Mastering
 - Needs to have an artistic sense
 - Team oriented
 - Has the technical requirements

The Engineer's Perspective: Capturing your Sound

A good engineer is a musician too! There are different approaches to this craft, and this is mine.

What the engineer needs from you:

- Introduce me to your facilities staff (They'll be my best friends for this!)
- A chance to check out the space ahead of time
 - Acoustics
 - How your ensemble interacts with the room
 - Suitability for various mic techniques
 - Noise issues (HVAC, adjacent spaces, external sources)
- A room isolated from the performance space
 - Also quiet (so I can really hear what I'm recording)
 - With access for a cable run
 - With reliable power
- Day of session: Adequate time for setup and strike!
- Perhaps someone who's interested in the tech side to be a "runner"

What the engineer will do for you

- In a good space? Capture your group in the space
- In a challenging space? Minimize the problems and enhance later
 - Important that your ensemble is comfortable and that the project is achievable in this space (Schedule? Budget? Logistics?)
- The project's purpose affects the choice of mic technique
 - Educational (hear each detail) vs. aesthetic (capture the overall)
- Working with producer on editing
 - How much is too much? (Capture the best performance, but not make something that didn't exist.)

What the engineer will NOT do for you

- Fix it in the mix
 - Balance is the conductor's job, in this style of recording
 - We can assemble the best takes, but we can't create a performance that wasn't there.

The engineer has done the job right when the music comes through and you don't notice the engineering!

The Producer's Perspective: Producing is Collaboration.

In educational recording scenarios, producers don't just "Call" recording sessions - they get involved months or even school years ahead of the recording sessions with the conductor on the: concept, preparation, execution of sessions, post recording phase, and mastering.

Preparation for recording sessions.

Preparation Phase can start with pre-visits by sending producer rehearsal and performance recordings (audio and video) months ahead of the proposed recording dates. Preparation Phase is best served by

early LIVE visits from producer to musically bond that person to the ensemble and conductor in the pursuit of excellence, meaning a great recording! These visits can be Digital if live cannot happen and be very successful.

"Do you hear what I hear?" - Lifting the level before sessions begin by giving aural feedback and challenging all to repeatedly listen until they are at a much higher level of aural awareness.

In The Recording Session:

Ultimately all that matters is what the microphones hear!

The producer is interpreter between recording technology and the musical intent of the composer, conductor and ensemble.

Finding a recording session sound mix that will make production easier and create a listening environment that allows for success in the execution of the recording session. The FINAL MIX is in the Post Recording Phase. The rhythm and feel of the recording session is the responsibility of the producer. This close psycho-musical bond with the conductor and performers should have occurred during the rehearsal phase or in previous work together. The producer's awareness of the stresses in the room, the feel of the coach /team relationship and how to motivate and pace these efforts as an art form. The rhythm and feel of a recording session can be found by all parties involved in the recording by holding Mock Recording Sessions and by rehearsing and perfecting small chunks of the music to recreate the musical wind sprint of recording small inserts.

Post Recording Phase:

Have the conductor MAP the edits that will become the final performance product, with possible help from the producer. The great improvement in aural skills that the activity of comparative listening brings to the conductor lasts for months after the recordings are finished and released!

By inviting the conductor to the EDITING sessions, a great listening team will form with the producer and engineer to pursue the common mission of completing the recording project successfully. A consensus level of excellence and a trust in each other to make the product exceptional help the teacher/conductor have a peak musical experience throughout the entire process ! The conductor now knows what is possible in the post recording phase while in future recording sessions. This helps make quicker decisions about whether fixes can be made later or not. Other benefits of conductor participation in the post recording phase are better tempo awareness, balance awareness, matching dynamics from take to take, and an unprecedented improvement in error detection.

MASTERING (or Finalizing) can also be a time when an impartial engineer (and fresh pair of ears) will set the final sound of the product with the recording team. The final soundest should successfully transfer to all types of playback modalities.... From the cheapest to the most expensive listen devices. The conductor's participation at the mastering level causes unprecedented growth in the subtle aural areas of delicate balance changes, minute timbral possibilities and even the selection of the silence between recorded selections or movements within the same work.

The conductor starts to view the recording team as the annual level-lifting Musical Cavalry!!