

Music 9535b
Dr. R. Toft
Term 2, Mondays 9:30-12:30, MB242

Recording Classical Music

This course provides an introduction to fundamental principles of digitally recording and editing acoustic music in ambient spaces that covers every step of the process. We will focus on stereo microphone techniques in classical genres to help performers unaccustomed to recording environments understand the processes involved in crafting records. Musicians spend thousands of hours preparing for the concert platform but relatively little time (if any) learning how to turn those performances into recorded sound. A concert-hall recital, replicated in front of microphones, rarely produces a satisfactory outcome on distribution media such as the Compact Disc or mp3, for the methods engineers and producers use to shape what listeners hear through loudspeakers have an enormous impact on the way people react to recorded performances. By providing information on the art of committing performances to disc, the course will enable musicians to turn recitals into raw tracking data that can be digitally edited into cohesive listening experiences. In other words, this is a practical course, not a musicological one.

The course deals with both theory and practice – the nature of soundwaves and their behaviour in rooms, microphone types and the techniques of recording in stereo, tracking through a digital audio workstation (DAW), “in-the-box” editing and mixing with commercially available software plugins, and the preparation of finished tracks for delivery in a variety of file types ranging from mp3 to wav.

After considering the theory behind sound recording and analysing representative commercial recordings, most of the term will be spent gaining hands-on experience in actual recording – tracking, editing, mixing, delivery – and the critical listening skills required for these activities. The practical sessions will involve small groups of students in recording and post-production situations during which the participants will be the performers, producers, and editors.

The class has at its disposal a matched pair of small diaphragm condenser mics, a large diaphragm condenser, and an Apogee interface. Our digital audio workstation will be Harrison Console’s Mixbus (Mac and PC), which Harrison has made available to us for approximately \$40 US. Mixbus is modelled on Harrison’s legendary 32C console, and it is perhaps the ideal platform for recording acoustic music. In addition to purchasing Mixbus, every student will need a laptop computer and a pair of closed-back headphones.

Classes will be held in Studio 242 in the Music Building, which has the acoustics we need for learning to record in ambient spaces.

REQUIREMENTS

- regular attendance at both the introductory lectures and the practical sessions which follow
- submission of a plan for the recording project to be undertaken (details of repertoire, mic locations, tracking procedures, etc.)
- completed recording (submission of the Mixbus file, a high res wav file, and an AAC or mp3)

GRADING

Attendance – 25%

Plan for the project – 25%

Completed recording – 50%