

## **Jeff Zahos**

### **Matt Jacklin Recording and Producing Project**

4.11,18.2010

#### **Overview and Goals**

Matt Jacklin, a doctoral student in percussion performance at the University of Illinois contacted me asking about the possibility of doing a recording session or series of sessions to capture his best performances as he neared the final preparation for a doctoral recital. I suggested that perhaps we could do the sessions in the Foellinger Great Hall, utilizing the best acoustical environment and equipment and make it an educational experience for both of us.

One goal is to generate two final CDs, each one tailored for a certain purposes as tools for Matt's professional development. One CD will contain un-edited, unaltered recordings for use in situations that have such stipulations such as competition screening, and applications for college teaching positions. The other recording will be constructed from the best takes and will represent an idealized performance, as if we were preparing it for commercial release. This recording will be useful as a promotional tool as part of a press pack for potential endorsers, arts producers, local arts councils, potential musical collaborators and booking agents.

For me, another goal is to have an initial experience serving as producer of a record, collaborating with the artist and artistically guiding the direction of the final product.

#### **Introduction to Producing**

Through my conversation with Jon regarding this project, it was decided that this would be a good opportunity for me to work as both engineer *and* producer through the entirety of a recording project. My familiarity with the literature, (I have recorded all of the pieces before, and played some of them myself), and my pre-existing relationship with the artist make this an ideal project through which to step into producing.

In the past, I had served as the *de facto* producer on many projects, however, with this project, all parties would enter the project knowing that I, the producer, would be directing the artistic direction of the project from start to finish.

#### **Literature**

Francois-Bernard Machet (b. 1935) - *Phenix* (1981)

Askell Masson - *Prim*

Elliot Carter (b. 1908) - *Eight Pieces for Four Timpani* (1950, revised 1966)

Quinn Collins - *Hi-Hat Piece*

Jacob Druckman (1928-1996) - *Reflections on the Nature of Water* (1986)

Andrew Thomas (b. 1939) - *Merlin* (1985)

## **Preparation**

The preparation for this session has included listening to the available recordings of these pieces (including some past recordings I'd done), and if there exists such a thing, the "definitive" recording. Additionally, the performer provided copies of each score for study, and I sought and read what has been written about the pieces, mostly in the publications archive of the Percussive Arts Society (accessible only to members). Renewing aural familiarity with the "definitive" recordings of the pieces will allow me to detect errors, inconsistencies, etc. more quickly, and listening to multiple versions helps give me a sonic bearing, from which I can decide on the "sonic concept" for which to aim in planning the engineering of the recording.

I consulted my personal records for how I'd recorded marimba in the Foellinger Great Hall in the past, listened to that recording and tried to develop a plan that would retain the elements of that recording which I liked, and improve on those that I don't.

## **Planning**

The idea for this project, including breaking it in to two sessions was brought up by Matt. I agreed that in addition to endurance issues for the performer posed by a single, very long session, doing two sessions would allow the respective recording set ups for marimba and the multi-percussion pieces could be done with more care.

Sessions were scheduled as follows: Session 1 - Sunday, April 11th 5pm-11pm, Session 2 - Sunday, April 18th 8am-2pm

Based on the preparation process outlined above, I arrived at an initial recording plans illustrated in Appendix 1.

The idea of using ORTF pair is rooted in my previous experiences recording marimba, mostly in Smith Recital Hall. I like the stereo spread of ORTF for marimba, and I find that any "gap" in the middle of the stereo field is not detected with marimba, because of its very dominant middle range. The Rode NTK large capsule tube condensers (LCC) will be used as the main stereo pair, to help give a certain softness to the transience of the the instrument. The marimba sound I have developed a preference for used two LCCs in ORTF through a Hamptone tube preamp, so it will be interesting to hear what characteristics are retained or not in this setup.

In the past, I have used flanking omnidirectional microphones, but in the FGH, I think flanking cardioids may pick up a more appropriate amount of reverberation. I would also like to experiment with using 3 more closely placed "overhead" microphones, mostly out of pure curiosity, although my suspicion is that these mics will pick up a somewhat slappy sound.

## **Recording Process**

The recording process was similar to the many sessions of this type that I'd done in the past. The main difference was that Matt understood that I would be having a say in which takes would be used, musical input, regarding interpretation (phrasing, tone, pace, dynamics, and many other musical factors), and that I would be making suggestions for the execution of the pieces. All of these things happened, and I felt like to good effect. Several times, suggestions I made helped Matt get over a hump in the performance, and knowing how editing would work, I was able to help him make effective transitions for recording snippets or sections of the pieces. A couple times, I suggested "cheats" that would be

impossible in live performance that made for a better recording - for instance using two mallets for a section that did not require all 4. In the first session, Matt was growing tired physically and mentally, and though time was short, and we agreed a break might help, and indeed, the remainder of the session was much more expedient and efficient.

### **Post Production Process**

Currently, the raw recorded material is being edited. This section will be updated as work continues.

### **Sonic Results Evaluation**

Editing and mixing of this project are ongoing, but my impression is that, for the most part, the raw recorded material will provide a good starting point to make an effective recording without too much difficult processing. This section will be updated as work continues.

### **Reflections for Future**

The experiment with closely placed LCCs (AKG 414 B-ULS) seems to have been successful. IN initial mixing, they have proved to be very useful in bringing out a bit of the articulation of all of the instruments, and add a pleasing depth to the sound of the instrument in the large surrounding sound of the hall. This section will be updated as work continues.

### **Appendices**

See photographs