

The Music Production Process



Technology For Performers

The Music Production Process: An Overview

- Pre-Production
- Production/Recording
- Post-Production
- Mastering

Pre-Production



Pre-Production

- Maximizing R.O.I.
- Session planning:
 - What material is to be recorded?
 - What are the stylistic/aesthetic goals for the project?
 - Who will the players be?
 - What studio facility or facilities will be used?
 - What is the timeline for the project? Are there deadlines to meet?
 - What is the budget?

Pre-Production

- For Classical this also includes planning which movements will be recorded on which days and which parts of the orchestra will be required for each session
- Classical recording sessions are expensive!!!
 - The more planning up front the better. Time is money.
 - This might result in shifting movements (or even sections of a movement) out of order if need be
- The producer will have studied the repertoire meticulously prior to the session, and will have likely prepared their own version of the score to notate on the day of the session

Pre-Production

- For pop, preproduction might include demoing material, finalizing arrangements, instrumentation, lyrics and individual parts for musicians
- This is also a good time to start thinking about the eventual album order of songs, considering the relative flow of key and tempo from song to song
- In all cases, the more preparation time put in during preproduction, the more efficient you can be in the studio

Role of the Producer



Role of the Producer

- To help the artist realize the musical goals established during preproduction
- To provide an omniscient, listeners perspective of the music
- To help communicate/translate ideas between the artist and engineer
- To manage the logistics of the recording protect
- To do anything else that can be done to make the session run smoother!
 - Getting coffee
 - Acting as a psychiatrist
 - Keeping the artist free from distraction

Classical Producer Roles

- More clearly defined barrier between engineer and producer in classical
- Engineer is in charge of ‘capturing the sound’
- Producer is the point-person for the session both musically as well as logistically:
 - Staying on time
 - Staying on budget
 - Making sure a musical piece is well covered between different takes
 - Working with the conductor to create a sense of musical cohesion between takes

Classical Producer Roles

- The producer is trusted by the musicians, engineer and record label to provide a listener's perspective and to keep the project up to standards
 - In this sense, the producer is also a critic. They can evaluate and help guide the interpretation of the repertoire before it is committed to recording
- The producer will always be looking out for something distinctive in the performance/interpretation to help it stand out in a competitive market (maximize R.O.I.)

Pop Producer Roles

- Typically more involved compositionally (as well as carrying out many of the same roles as a classical producer)
- Role has changed a great deal over the past 50 years
- Now, 'producer' could mean the person 'making the beat' (i.e. the composer). This is very typical in hip-hop, modern R&B and electronic music
- Common nowadays for producers to wear many hats during a project: performer, composer, arranger, recording engineer, mix engineer, etc.

Recording



Recording Classical

- Tracking, followed by patch sessions for fixes, solo features, overdubs (doubling strings etc.)
- Musicians are expensive, so if you can do a patching session with less personnel it is preferable

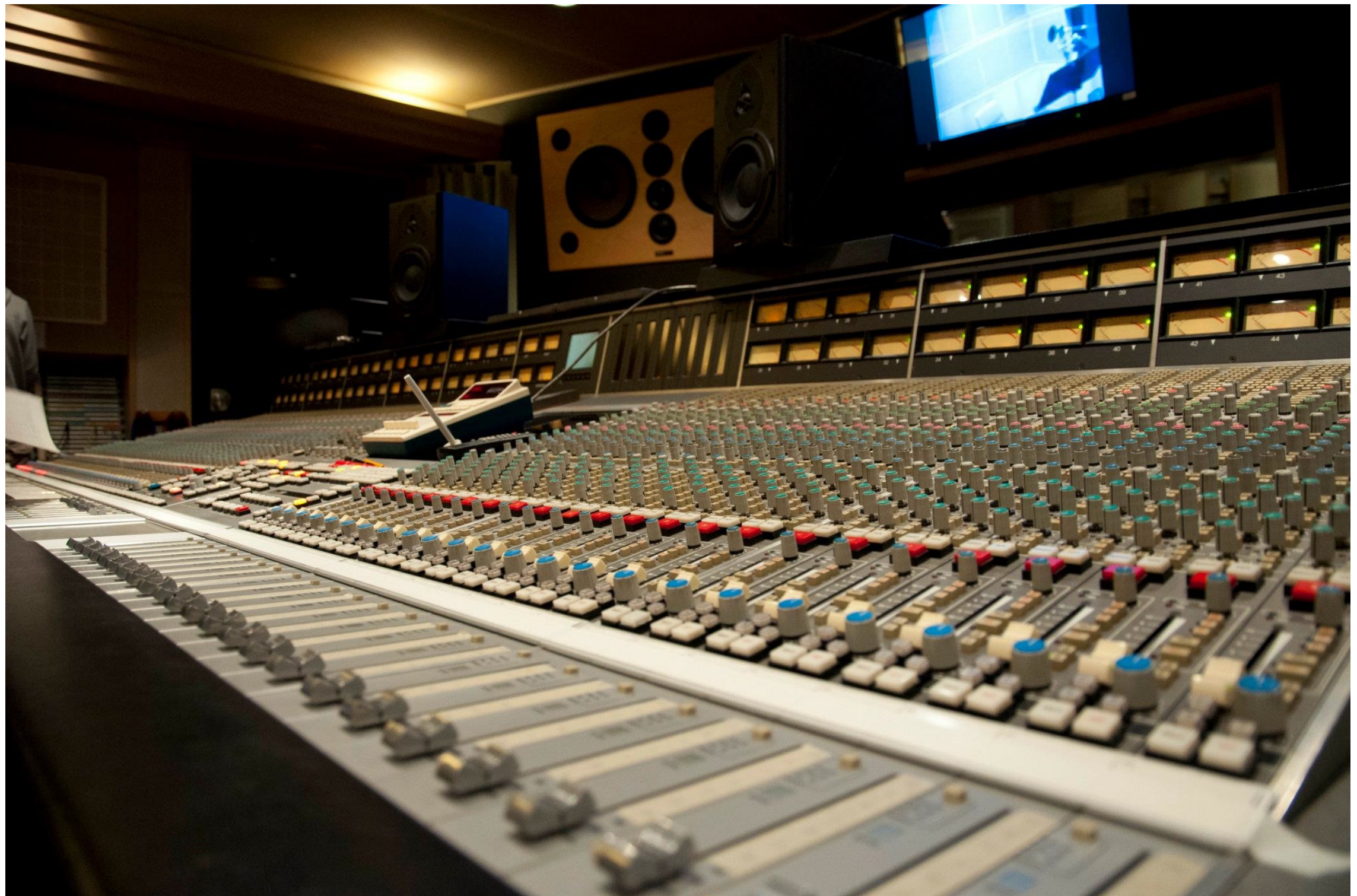
Recording Classical

- In North America, orchestral recording sessions are conducted according to AFM union rates and regulations (<http://www.afm.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Sound-Recording-Agreement.pdf>)
 - 3 or 4 hour 'Basic' sessions (one or two in a day), with extra payment for overtime, doubling, etc.
 - Rules for how much playing time vs. resting time in an hour, as well as how much recorded material can be derived from each session
 - *"...playing time shall not exceed an average of 40 minutes for each hour with an average rest period of 20 minutes for each hour."*
 - *"...No more than an average of seven and one-half minutes of finished recorded music may be made from each one-half hour segment of a recording session (including all overtime periods),..."*
 - Union rep present at session to ensure standards are followed

Recording Pop

- Bed tracks - Foundational elements recorded first, typically the rhythm section instruments
- Scratch tracks - Parts performed alongside of bed tracks for use as a guide, which will be replaced later with a more polished version
- Overdubs - Elements added later on, building on top of the bed tracks

Post-Production



Post-Production

- Editing
 - Should be the first step after recording
 - If doing overdubs, editing the bed tracks prior to overdubbing is preferred
 - A composite performance is created from the best parts of each take
 - Tuning and timing may be altered to polish the performance (common in both pop and classical)
 - Editing (for both classical and pop) could range from very minimal to radical reconstructive surgery

Post-Production

- De-noising
 - Removing any unwanted non-musical sounds captured during recording
 - This goes hand in hand with editing - If a sound can't be de-noised, it may be edited out
 - Sometimes this process is put off until the end of post-production for the simplicity of de-noising a stereo file instead of a multitrack

Post-Production

- Mixing
 - Finalizing the balance and panning of the multitrack
 - Adding effects if needed to help arrive at the desired sound
 - Adding automation if needed
 - Depending on the material and genre, mixing can be a subtle process or one that is very intensive and potentially an extension of the composition/production phases

Mastering



Mastering

- Preparing the final mixes for release:
 - Quality control: a mastering facility is a highly specialized environment designed for critical listening purposes
 - Adjustments: making the music sound consistent from track to track in terms of volume and overall frequency content
 - This can help compensate for any sonic differences between tracks that were mixed in different listening environments
- Assembly and pacing
- Determining the overall loudness of the album
 - Adjustments for different mediums (CD, vinyl, playback in an airplane, hi-resolution, etc.)