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CHARM Symposium 2: Towards a musicology of production

Part of the Art of Record Production Conference produced by MusicTank, Thames Valley University, the University of Westminster and CHARM, held on the 17th and 18th of September 2005 at University of Westminster, London.

The second CHARM symposium formed part of the *Art of Record Production* international conference, which served as a unique meeting point between academia and the industry of both 'art' and popular record production. Re-evaluating the influential but often unrecognized and uncredited role of sound engineers and producers, the conference offered an opportunity to reconsider the art of record production as a discipline in its own right and not merely as a sub-section of sound engineering or music technology. Entitled *Towards a Musicology of Production*, the CHARM strand in the Symposium represented the interdisciplinary nature of CHARM, featuring presentations from producers, performers, and musicologists from the different artistic and commercial contexts of Pop, Rock and Classical music.

The vast implications of the decisions made by record producers in the process of recording were discussed in terms of various aspects. Demonstrating a large selection of choir recordings made in the complicated acoustics of the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge, Timothy Day (British Library Sound Archive) discussed some of the core questions concerning the nature of recordings: can recordings be a reproduction of the live experience, or is the performance re-imagined by the producer for the microphone?

Simon Frith (University of Stirling) focused on how Rock record reviewers impact on our understanding of the work of producers. Michael Haas shared his extensive experience in studio recordings as an independent producer, reflecting on the musicological implications of the choices made by producers in Classical music recordings.

David Patmore (University of Sheffield and CHARM) presented a paper that focused on the work of John Culshaw, well-known as a producer for Decca Records in the 1950s and 1960s, discussing Culshaw's philosophy of the recording as an art work in its own right, as well as the reasons for its decline. Also delving into the work of one particular producer, Andrew Blake (University of Winchester) focused on Suvi Raj Grubb, a major EMI producer during the 1960s. Mapping Suvi Raj Grubb's ethnic and professional profile - which was unique for his time - Blake explored his role in shaping his period's high fidelity and stereo sonic ideal.

In his presentation, Simon Zagorski-Thomas (Thames Valley University) observed the ways sound was designed in American and British popular music studios during the 1970s. The differences between the two national styles were examined from a psychoacoustic and cognitive perspective, with emphasis on the technological, cultural and aesthetic reasons for these

differences.

The performer's point of view was presented in two papers. Sharing his first-hand experience in recording studios as a performer, Colin Lawson (Royal College of Music) reflected on the contribution of the microphone to early music culture, and its influence on the ways 'historical' and 'authenticity' conceptions were shaped. Another rare look at recordings 'behind-the-scenes' was offered by Donald Greig (professional singer). Reflecting on the nature of recordings as a document, his paper observed the ways the hidden parts of the recording process contribute to the creation of what might be considered unreliable memory.

Arguing that musicology provides no information on a vast part of music making, David Carter (Griffith University, Queensland) explored an eventual model for the musicology of production. Looking into recording technology as a compositional tool and recognising the producer as creative figure, as well as taking into account the collaborative nature of recordings, Carter suggested basing his model on three main channels: first, on the production process (done through the producer, but not necessarily directly by him), second, on the sonic characteristics of the recorded product, and third, on the historical, cultural and sociological context of the production.

Paul Ramshaw (Thames Valley University) explored the links between performance, composition and production. Taking into account new technologies and the technical skills and understanding they require, Ramshaw's paper reflected on the possibility of considering the computer as a compositional tool and the producer as a composer.

The conference included many more papers and panel discussions during the two days in its three parallel sessions. It served as an unparalleled and enriching opportunity to have a glance at a new field of research at its inception.