The Art of Record Production

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In early 2005 I came across an intriguing call for papers in what was called ‘The Art of Record Production’ (ARP) conference to be hosted in London later that same year. It listed themes about recording practices, authenticity, perception, musicianship, production and technologies. I had never seen this kind of opportunity before and so I committed to preparing a piece based on exactly this kind of work at my university. Over the next few months I found a little travel funding and as it would happen, was accompanied by one of my PhD students who was equally attracted to the prospect. We found the conference to be a provocative breath of fresh air but mostly recall being inspired by ARP’s founder, Dr Simon Zagorski-Thomas with whom we shared a few quite beers with at a wonderful British pub.

Fast forward to the present day and I’ve just returned from the equally satisfying ARP conference in Quebec to find myself reflecting on how far this movement has come since 2005. The organisation is now run by co-founders and joint chairs Katia Isakoff and Simon Zagorski-Thomas, with a board of industry figures and academics representing universities in over twenty countries worldwide. I now regularly use ARP publications, resources and contacts in my teaching and research supervision activities, but moreover, it would seem that the idea of the ‘art’ in record production continues to evolve an emphasis so relevant to contemporary musicians and the digital environment. In this article I will briefly review the ARP aims, achievements and resources available in the context of the Australian higher education setting.

The Association for the Study of the Art of Record Production

The playback of recordings is a primary means of experiencing music in contemporary society and in recent years musicologists and popular music theorists have begun to examine the ways in which the production of recordings affects not just the sound of the final product – but also musical aesthetics more broadly. Record production may indeed be viewed as part of the creative process of composition. Training in the use of these forms of technology has moved from an apprentice-based system into university education where pedagogy, research and professional practice intersect to produce a new academic field: the history, analysis and practice of the production of recorded music.

The Association for the Study of the Art of Recorded Music (ASARP) has emerged to focus on a recognition of these developments as a research area, while many of its members are located within professional organisations as advocates for an understanding of the wider realm of musical practice, scholarship, research policy and governance. The Executive includes Richard James Burgess (Smithsonian Folkways, Washington), Anne Danielsen (University of Oslo), Simon Frith (University of Edinburgh), Mike Howlett (Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane), Katia Isakoff (The Altersonic Sound Company), Allan Moore (University of Surrey), William Moylan (University of Massachusetts Lowell), Paul Theberge (Carleton University, Ottawa), Simon Zagorski-Thomas (London College of Music, UWL) and Albin Zak (University of New York State at Albany). ASARP membership costs £15.00 per year (AU $25), its benefits including discount conference rates, access to research data, audio and video recordings, international email list and related discussion fora.

Conferences and Events

The UK Music Producers Guild and the US Producers and Engineers Wing of the Recording Academy (GRAMMYs) have participated in ARP conferences including in Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA. The conference framework has provided high quality research publications, practical in-studio presentations and workshops, as well international keynote presentations from music luminaries including Steve Albini, Joe Boyd, Robin Millar, André Perry, Phil Ramone, Hank Shocklee, Narada Michael Walden and Pete Waterman. For the immediate future, the ASARP is working on the launch of the UK Music Research Consortium.
in October 2013; a PhD and postdoctoral symposium *Sonic Signatures* at the University of Aalborg in 2014; and also in 2014, the 9th ARP conference to be held in Oslo.

While the international conference usually occurs annually, at the same time the ASARP is seeking to expand upon regional events. For example, it is presently under consideration that while some specialised activities may run in the northern hemisphere, sister events might be simultaneously held in Australian universities. This could potentially allow for a degree of real-time interaction via Internet technologies, but more pertinently, may prove valuable for post-event compilation and distribution of outcomes and insights into cultural variances. The ASARP and/or its local members therefore welcome proposals from any higher education institution anywhere in the world about the ways in which such ideas might be expanded in the future – both in terms of conferences, but also terms of innovative regional foci.

**The Journal on the Art of Record Production**

The Journal on the Art of Record Production (JARP) is a peer reviewed scholarly journal first established in 2006, its Editorial Board membership recently re-constituted and expanded to include four Australian representatives. The JARP is published on a dedicated website and ISSN, led by editors-in-chief, Dr Richard James Burgess and Katia Isakoff. Every second issue of the journal features a call for works along thematic lines, while each alternate publication features the ARP Conference papers. In Australia, JARP publications are highly valuable to constituent academic music disciplines as recognised peer-reviewed journal articles for the Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA) federal government requirements.

JARP publications remain open access while the ASARP is considering expanding its distribution even further via EBSCO. Now with a seven year database of papers, reviews and insights into record production practice, the JARP has become a highly valuable resource for many academics. Links may be easily circulated to students without pay-walls or other restrictions to form the basis of debate and expansion of musical scope, but more often then not – forward progression via dissertations or undergraduate projects based on the shoulders of some of these pieces. For example: in Alan Williams’ (2012) provoking thoughts about the role of the visual in music making, where we can ‘see’ music on the screens of our computers; a fascinating study into the seminal production of Led Zeppelin’s *When the Levee Breaks* by Aaron Liu Liu-Rosenbaum (2012); or via an international research exchange between Leeds Metropolitan University (UK) and the University of Newcastle (Australia) in an examination of collaborative composition and copyright (Morey & McIntyre, 2011).

**The Book**

Editors Simon Frith and Simon Zagorski-Thomas released *The Art of Record Production* on Ashgate Publishing in 2012. It is designed as a text for undergraduate degree courses studying the creative processes involved in the production of recorded music. The aim is to introduce students to the variety of approaches and methodologies that are currently being employed by scholars in this field and is divided into three sections covering historical considerations, theoretical approaches, and case studies on practice. Book chapters are written by academics from all over the world, but uniquely, are accompanied by interludes of commentary on the contributions from leading record producers and industry professionals. Overall this collection provides scholars and students with an overview of the ways in which analytical and practice-based considerations may be brought together to exemplify how the field is progressing along interdisciplinary lines. As one reviewer sums up:

> Just a glance at the list of contributors – all prominent scholars and practitioners – reveals the value of this volume. But take a closer look and it becomes clear what a thoughtfully produced, methodologically diverse, thoroughly researched, and engaging work this is. The Art of Record Production is an ideal companion for anyone interested in the aesthetic, cultural, musical, and technical aspects of recorded music. (Mark Katz, University of North Carolina)
Funded Research

In 2013 ASARP UK members were awarded a Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) grant for a project entitled Performance in the Recording Studio (PitS), and as such perhaps encourages consideration by local academics for future Australia Research Council projects. In PitS, a research network is being developed to establish methodologies for studying performance in the recording studio but which also aims to be applicable to a variety of other forms of creative practice in the digital age.

Researchers are investigating the ways in which technologies and techniques effect musical practices. It is proposed that cut and paste editing, signal processing, auto-tune and audio time correction have prompted and challenged musicians to adapt their creative practice in similar ways that actors have adapted to working in the cinema: working non-linearly and for an hypothetical audience. The methodology for the project has developed out of these digital transformations toward the potential of an ‘infinite archive’. The premise is to use a variety of digital media to capture multiple facets of studio practices via multiple cameras and audio recordings throughout a number of stages of the work. This is accompanied by interviews with the participants, analyses by various network members, responses to the analyses by the participants and discussions between the academics and the practitioners.

In April 2013 much of this material formed the basis of an international ‘virtual conference’. Over a period of four days, Internet contributors commented upon the project and its data and its propositions though related presentations and papers. This and other network events have been made available online and so material becomes the basis for another recursion of interpretation leading to the project’s conclusions and future publications.

The Future

The JARP Editorial Board had the good fortune to spend some face-to-face time together at the 2013 conference in Quebec and out of this came much inspiration and new plans. Some of this has been explored above, and to summarise and draw this article to a conclusion this includes:

• Open access scholarly resources are available on line via the journal website.
• The Art of Record Production book will be a valuable addition to many university libraries, and as an adjunct to scholarly work in this field.
• ASARP membership and access to its benefits are encouraged as one way to help to continue to resource the organisation.
• A second book is now being planned as a result of the work undertaken in Quebec.
• A dedicated ARP YouTube channel is in the making to focus on past ARP conferences, core activities and keynote presentations.
• The next 2014 conference will be held in Oslo, while a new style of PhD and postdoctoral event will be held in Denmark.

Hopefully this article spreads the word and makes clearer what the ASARP has achieved since its inception in 2005. At the same time, the ARP movement is exploring opportunities for expansion and especially in terms of regional contexts, community chapters and events. Local members in particular will be pleased to hear about new Australian proposals.

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References


ASARP Membership http://www.artofrecordproduction.com/index.php/join-asarp

ARP proposals. Are you interested in hosting a conference or other event? http://www.artofrecordproduction.com/index.php/arp-conferences/hosting-information

JARP (Journal on the Art of Record Production). http://arpjournal.com


