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Sonic Signature Aspects in Research on Music Production Projects
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The purpose of this short paper is to present selected results from both finished and on-going research projects focusing selected aspects concerning how participants in music production projects contribute with sonic signatures. In my PhD-project, Music Production with Changing Tools – a Challenge to Formal Education I present a three-dimensional music production model where different approaches for how to producing music are shown (figure 1). The primary objective of this music production model is to analyse how music producers approach their task. This model can also be used to discuss educational aspects on music production. I have termed two divergent approaches for how to make music productions. The recording is either documentation or production. An example of the documentation approach is a classical concert that is recorded with the objective to make it sound as similar as possible to the actual concert. In contrast, with a production there is no requirement to make the recording sound like a genuine acoustic event. With the production strategy the objective is to create reality, not to record it. The second dimension shows how different producers work with different strategies. Some producers work actively and take part in the actual recording sessions as production leaders. Other producers are more passive and take part in the production on a more distanced basis, such as perhaps financing a project but not taking part in the actual production work, also described as an executive producer. Thirdly, there is the supporting and directing producer style. For the supporting producer the artist is the ‘centre of attraction’. The directing producer uses a different strategy, where the producer is the ‘centre of attraction’. A challenge, in the digital world we now live in, is that previous research and literature concerning the music producer role often can be described as anecdotal portraits of the recording industry and may not in all respect be valid in in the art of record production in the Internet age. Therefore it is also a challenge to develop methods for music production and theory relevant to this valid even in a changing landscape like todays conditions for creative music production.

Figure 1. A three-dimensional music production model.²

In another research project three different music production projects, with music produced for a special purpose, was analysed.³ The first project: a stage music drama production, the second project: a radio music drama production and the third project: a movie soundtrack. The productions were produced independently of each other by different producers and all three projects were carried out on behalf of different clients: a stage production company, a national radio broadcaster and a movie production company. One aspect that unites these three projects is that the music was produced to sound like if it was recorded with real traditional orchestral musical instruments played by musicians in a real orchestra, but the productions were almost exclusively made with virtual instruments and modern audio production software. Common to the three projects is also that real musicians played some recorded parts but these parts, with few exceptions, underwent extensive processing to change, for example, pitch, rhythm, timbre or dynamics. In some cases, the music parts with the real musicians were recomposed after the recordings to better fit in the context, the stage production, the radio drama and the movie.

The analysis of the three projects was implemented multidisciplinary based on previous research on music production. Media theory, design theory, learning theory, and theories of intellectual property were also used to provide a broader perspective. The main methods of data collection included participant observation, qualitative interviews with the music producers and analysis of the music recordings created during the three projects.

The results comprise four different aspects. Copyright issues, ethical and artistic aspects, questions about what skills music producers needs to have in order to achieve set production objectives and how the technology used for the recording and processing of the recorded music influenced the final result. The results show that modern software tools for music production in digital audio workstations can be used to arrange, record and edit music with great accuracy and detail and that it’s even for trained listeners sometimes very difficult to distinguish an authentic recording with a live orchestra from a production where virtual digital musical instruments are used. In addition, certain software can be used to manipulate previously recorded music and even to recompose music. The study has also generated new questions. When music is created, as in these three projects, it is fair to discuss: Who is the originator of the music being created? Are the projects described in this study art and if so, what kind of art? To what extent is it fine art or applied art? And how can studies such as this contribute to the development of education in the art of music production? Finally, it’s of great importance to further explore how the tools used in music production affect the recorded music.

In one on-going research project I’m involved in investigating how mixing popular music with Loudness Units Full Scale – LUFS, differ from traditional mixing with the loudness war in mind. In another on-going research project I investigate how the gatekeepers of the music industry changes shape as a consequence of the digital media development. And in one more on-going research project I investigate the Musical Temperament among music producers and others involved in music production. One over all question that pops up when different aspects of music production is discussed concerns copyright and how those who produce music and their work in musical productions should generate recognition as well as compensation in form of royalty payments. This is however not at all a new issue even if it


sometimes is discussed so in the age of Internet. When J. S. Bach walked down the streets in Leipzig he some turned his pockets inside out in order to clearly demonstrate that he was dissatisfied with the compensation he received for his musical achievements (figure 2 and 3).

Figure 2. Statue by Carl Seffner (1861-1932) of Johann Sebastian Bach at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig.

Figure 3. Johann Sebastian Bach with his pockets inside out.