REVIEW | Understanding Records. A Field Guide to Recording Practice. Second Edition

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The present volume is an update of the version published in 2010. The basic ideas for this publication are described by Hodgson in the book's introduction. It is aimed in particular at beginners. Expanded by playlists on Spotify and links to YouTube videos, readers gain knowledge, get insights and achieve an understanding of the various layers and processes involved in the production of music recordings. The author defines "Recording Practice" as the art of using sound to represent sound(s), and a totally unique way of musically communicating (3). Furthermore, it is important to him to extend the predominantly technical approach of audio engineering handbooks by providing insights into aesthetic programs, or to deliver a broader aesthetic orientation for the technical procedures (5-6).

Some of the introductory references to the neglect of the subject in popular music studies or to historical methods of notation during the analysis of recorded music now seem somewhat outdated. A good point, however, is that the scientific analyses and interpretations of recorded music should include not only the performers but provide equal weight to the engineers and producers. However, this can now be regarded as an accepted standard within studies of record production (for example: Frith and Zagorski-Thomas 2012; von Appen et al. 2015).

The main section of the book is divided into three chapters: 1) "tracking (making audio signals)"; 2) "mixing (the space of communications)"; and 3) "mastering (the final say)", followed by a short "coda". Within the chapters there are so-called "meta-techniques" and "sub-techniques" (6), which the author uses to illustrate fundamentals or specifics. Chapter 1 outlines the meta-techniques of "transduction" (physics, microphone selection and placement basics), a very short part on "direct-

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injection" plus "sequencing" (DAW basics, comping, tuning, editing basics). Many of the basics mentioned can also be found in other available titles, but what makes the new edition of the book worthwhile and didactically valuable, especially for beginners, are the extra materials that are offered. The author and his artist friends provide original compositions and productions, which are of a high standard. Moreover, their specialist skills provide vivid illustration for the production and aesthetic subjects under discussion. In addition, the multi-perspective videos or screen-recordings of "Recording Practice" give good insights and illustrate in a simple way the sometimes complex aesthetic considerations and technical approaches, plus they offer a glance at the use of current production tools. However, less space is given to aesthetic considerations and the development of corresponding expertise on the part of the readers.

The "mixing" chapter starts with a historical review of multi-tracking and bouncing, then moves on to Dockwray and Moore's "soundbox" tool (2010), illustrating graduations in the dimensions of frequency, panorama and depth. Some of the passages here, which only deal with "vocal priority", are sometimes too autobiographical. This is a bit irritating and does not support the actual intention of the book, albeit that some genuine insights are provided. Next follows a section on "signal processing". Some of the sub-themes here have been more clearly dealt with in other publications (such as Burgess 2013, Hepworth-Sawyer et al. 2019), but there are good examples in this book, such as the linked video by Alex Chuck Krotz explaining equalization. Other phenomena such as "side-chain pumping" are also well explained and can be understood and heard through the examples. A main focus in this chapter is on guitars: providing short histories of the technology and explanations of technical equipment and effects such as distortion, overdrive, re-amping, feedback and stomp boxes, delays and echo.

The "mastering" chapter starts with a historical review and addresses aspects such as loudness and the "loudness war", before turning to "the art of mastering". Under these subheadings you will find parameters like sequencing, equalization, dynamics, mid-side processing, the transfer process and more. Unfortunately, there are fewer playlists or videos in this third section of the book. One could get the impression that from the author's point of view "the art of mastering" can no longer be easily conveyed in an auditory or visual way. Nevertheless, the reader could be provided with a better understanding of corresponding decisions and adaptations so that fundamental differences, and above all aesthetic operations and decisions, could be perceived.

As the author himself says in the introduction and also in the coda of his book, his approach is not exhaustive: "I have only been able to scratch the surface of Recording Practice–and just barely at that" (204). However, this second edition offers a wealth of material that is suitable for self-study on the one hand, but can also be used in basic courses on this subject at undergraduate level. The playlists, original compositions and videos provide a very good framework for acquiring skills in the perception and contextualization of "Recording Practice".

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