

AUDIBILITIES

By Emmet Robinson

Professional Audio Services for Any Purpose You Can Think Of

Volume 49, Spring, 2011

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Digital Audio – Fact and Fiction

There are a great number of popular myths and misunderstandings about the capabilities of digital audio. The Fact is, most things take longer than we expect them to. There are good reasons for this.

In creating a CD from an old 78 rpm record or original tape, original recordings will only play in real time. That means that a 60-minute record or tape will actually require a full hour to play.

In that hour, using a real-time CD burner, the original recording can be transferred directly to a CD. Although that sounds simple enough, there is a downside to that method. There will be no control over either the sound quality or the recording level. Skipped grooves, failed tape splices, unwanted noise or sudden changes in recording level on the original will become part of the CD copy. No corrections are possible.

A better approach is to use that same hour to create a Digital Session File in the computer to provide full control of all of these factors. Once created, the Digital Session File can be manipulated in many different ways.

First, what is the optimum recording level achievable – and how long will it take to establish it? Because this requires repeated listening and measuring, we can't tell in advance.

Next, a sophisticated software program can be used to correct the ticks, pops, hiss and random static that are part and parcel of most disk recordings. The software includes several tools for specific types of noise. Each one must be adjusted for the best sound quality. How long will this take? Because this also can only be done by repeated listening, we can't predict that either.

For individual track access, converting each song or segment to AIFF format for transfer to CD also runs in real time. Three minutes of audio will take three minutes to convert. Converting 12 average-length tracks will take 30 to 45 minutes.

Finally, after all this prep work, we can make a quality CD. This happens rather quickly – in most cases 2 to 3 minutes. The bulk of the preceding time – often several hours – is used in preparation.

An original CD can be copied quickly – *because it's already digitized*. Analog sources, however, can require much more time and careful attention. Now you know why!

opportunities for the new voice in town.

Several new clients have been in to record their demos. All had good diction, pleasant voices and were quite easy to listen to. They each were able to develop their own scripts, and arrived here well rehearsed. All were comfortable with the little coaching that was required, and each left the studio with a completed demo.

Now they can begin making contacts and prospecting for work. The secret of success is that organizational skills can take you farther than talent.

In developing their own contact lists, reducing them to qualified leads, and then keeping themselves top-of-mind through perpetual marketing, they'll discover that patient, methodical, organized prospecting eventually produces results. When a new voice is needed, it could be yours!

For detailed printed instructions on how to become a voiceover artist, call 610-647-4341.

The Emerald Isle

Being half Irish myself, it was a pleasure to record an interview with a delightful lady from the Emerald Isle. Interviewed by her daughter, she described what life was like growing up in Ireland in a much earlier time. In the years before television, life was far simpler. In many ways, it was also richer because family, friends and neighbors connected directly rather than through electronic communications media.

The interview went extremely well, with the questions arranged chronologically, leading the listener smoothly from past to present. A Canon D-50 digital camera was used to create a custom cover for the CDs, giving them a finished appearance.

Words and Music Planning Ahead

In an unusual recording session, a client has pre-recorded his own memorial service with a mixture of spoken remarks and carefully chosen music. What a great idea! When you're gone, you have no control over how others conduct your funeral. Creating

IN THE STUDIO

Words

Keeping Clients Informed

The folks at McCombs Insurance in West Chester are savvy marketers. When callers are placed on hold for any length of time, they can hear descriptions of the wide variety of services available at McCombs. The idea being that the audio menu allows prospects and clients to make more informed choices. The electronics for the system were a one-time investment, and periodic upgrades to the recorded message are paid for by the first caller who orders something other than what they originally called about.

It's an advertising medium that pays for itself. This can work for you. What products or services do you offer that your callers need to know about?

Fresh Voices

In what we call "voiceover work," most of the narration we hear on radio, TV and in the occasional training program is done by people who are established, well-known, and can produce a predictable result. This can provide something of a barrier to the newcomer wanting to break into the business. Luckily, nothing remains the same for very long, and life is subject to change. Change can provide

a CD of the important stuff helps to ensure that things are done according to your wishes.

I've finally started writing mine. It begins with, "Hi, this is Emmet. Hmm. I was hoping for a larger crowd..." It all goes downhill from there!

Words and Pictures

On the Web

I was pleased to be asked to provide the voiceover for a web-based infomercial produced for a major pharmaceutical company. The purpose of the program was to introduce a dynamic new web-based support system to company sales reps. With a laptop or PDA, a comprehensive database is available to company personnel anywhere in the world. We produced two versions. One was business-like; the other was energetic and friendly. The client wisely chose the second version.

On the Air

On occasion, projects are brought here for completion that began somewhere else. For example, a TV commercial for an exciting new brand of cookware was complete – except for the closing message, or "tag." Since the product inventor was already in the area for an appearance on QVC, he stopped in here to complete the audio track. The final recording was sent by email to the production company in Las Vegas, where the words will be married to the images.

Music

Guitar Spoken Here

As a guitar picker for more than fifty years, I take particular pleasure in working with guitarists. Several new musicians have been in to record this season. Each had a distinctive style, and all were enjoyable in their own way. One was still in high school and may be able to use his recording in applying for a college scholarship.

If you've always wanted to play the guitar, and didn't know how to get started, lessons are available here in folk and country style pickin'. Call 610-647-4341 for details.

FROM THE ATTIC

Music

At the Fair

Recently discovered in the studio archives were open reel tapes of an exotic musical instrument called a Fair Organ. Large enough to require its

own travel trailer, this unique combination of organ, tuned bells, drums and other percussion instruments was used at county fairs to entertain and attract people to the event. It operated in the same way as a player piano, with a perforated paper roll programmed to operate all of the organ keys and other effects.

I'd recorded two of these instruments on location in the summer of 1990. Using two systems at the same time, I used an open reel tape recorder with an S-VHS video tape as a backup. After 21 years, the open reel tapes had become unplayable. The videotapes, however, played perfectly and have now been converted to the digital format. That redundancy in recording made restoration possible. That's one of the main reasons the main computer here has separate large capacity outboard hard drives. If one set of files becomes corrupted, another set may still be available on another drive.

Sweet Harmony!

Brought to light after more than forty years was a collection of superb barbershop quartet singing.

The recordings included two open-reel tapes, a record album, an audio cassette and a digital Walkman.

One open reel tape was fairly straightforward, with fourteen songs in sequence. The other was more challenging, being interspersed with bits and pieces of radio and television broadcasts, country-western music, a talent show, cuts from popular records and a business training program!

The 33 rpm album was processed with specialized software to reduce the ticks and pops inherent in disk records. The audiocassette was quite clean, with just a little processing required to remove residual tape hiss.

After many hours of careful listening, all of the individual songs were identified, isolated and carefully labeled as separate tracks. Where necessary, fades were added at the beginning and end of each track, the low-frequency noise reduced, and each track converted to the standard format for transfer to CD. The final result was well worth the effort, with outstanding vocal harmonies preserved for family and friends.

Gifted

When Harry's band broke up, he continued on his own as a solo pianist and a career that lasted many years. I

was privileged to learn about his music while restoring a selection of audiocassettes and converting them to CD. Some musicians are good, and some are *very* good. Harry was gifted! In a rare combination of technique and taste, Harry played an astounding array of popular music with complete ease, often blending several songs together smoothly in extended medleys.

Do, Re, Mi, Fa

The audio cassette of piano accompaniment for vocal exercises was quite old. And, being a tape, it didn't play exactly on pitch. After converting the tape to a digital session file, it was possible to adjust the tuning to match a standard pitch reference. The CDs that resulted were accurate – and will always play in tune.

Dixie

I've always loved a form of music known as Dixieland Swing. I think of it as "happy" music. The finest I've ever heard arrived here on an old open reel tape. There were no labels and no information about the name of the band or the names of the musicians, but all of them were virtuosos. My favorites were the pianist and the banjo player who played solos that were absolutely amazing! Musical treats like this make it a genuine pleasure to come to the studio every day!

Words

The Old Folks at Home

A challenge was delivered here from Ohio in the form of a collection of 78 rpm acetate disks recorded in Kansas in the 1940s. All but one were completely playable. After removing much of the surface noise, they were all assembled on one CD.

Multiple copies were sent first by certified mail. Once they'd arrived safely, the original records were packaged carefully in a sturdy carton for shipment back to Ohio.

If you have old disk recordings, please don't try to play them! Without the necessary special equipment they can be easily damaged. Bring them here instead for proper handling.

Images

Having an interest in art and a background in photography has led me to begin restoring and retouching old photos. What old photographic portraits or snapshots do you have that need to be preserved?