

loses its meaning; in pop music—except that this reflection requires a lot of work, from many professionals—"immediacy" costs a lot.

[translated by Marianne Sinclair and Mark Smith]

NOTES

¹ *Directeur artistique*, here and throughout the article, is translated as "producer"; even though in France the *directeur artistique*'s functions overlap those of the A&R man as well as those of the producer (as those roles are understood in Britain and the United States); "producer" seems the nearest equivalent.—Ed.

² Most of the quotations in this article come from interviews with producers or other professionals in the record industry. More precise details of their sources are mentioned only when relevant.

Edward R. Kealy

FROM CRAFT TO ART

The Case of Sound Mixers and Popular Music

1979

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This essay proceeds from the occupational perspective of a particular popular music collaborator—the one credited on record album jackets as the "recording engineer" or "sound mixer." The sound mixer is a popular art technician, a type of collaborator also common to theatrical, radio, television, and film productions, but whose role in shaping the aesthetics of popular art is little understood. In addition to illuminating the role of the popular art technician, studying the recent history of the sound mixer's relationships with his collaborators provides the sociology of art with examples of how a craft becomes art and how craftsmen attempt to become artists. For, in the late 1960s, recording artists began annexing the craft of sound mixing to their art, while some sound mixers attempted to slough off their designation as "technicians" and to establish a new collaborative role as "artist-mixers." These reciprocal transformations created problems for popular music collaborators and led to the emergence of new institutions for production in this art world.

H. S. Becker has noted that such a transformation is a sequence typical of art history and has affected in recent years such diverse crafts as weaving, pottery, glass blowing, furniture making, and clothing design.¹ He posits that such a transformation occurs when artists become interested in the craft materials as a new medium for artistic expression and make attempts to take it over. The results of such a transformation show up primarily in two ways: (1) a change in the aesthetic conventions for judging the crafted

objects from utilitarian to expressive and (2) a change in the status of the work—and the workers—from technical to artistic. The following study specifies how this process took place in popular music collaborations and transformed sound mixing from a craft to an art.

THE SOUND MIXER

As a cultural artifact, popular music has three major components: the music, the commercial system for promoting and distributing it to a mass audience, and the technology for recording and reproducing it. The division of labor among popular music collaborators reflects these components. Usually present at studio recording sessions are music makers (musicians, composers, arrangers), music marketers (record company artists-and-repertoire men or record producers), and recording technicians (sound mixers).

The sound mixer's work represents the point where music and modern technology meet. A sound mixer must know the characteristics of hundreds of microphones and a variety of acoustic environments, and how to employ them to best record a musical instrument; the capabilities and applications of a large array of sound-processing devices, such as echo chambers; the physical capacities of recording media (such as tapes and discs) for accepting and reproducing sounds; the operation of various recording machines; and, finally, how to balance or "mix" at a recording console the electronic impulses coming into a studio "control room" from a variety of live and prerecorded studio sound sources so as to produce a tape that contains a recognizable and effective musical experience. During the decade 1965–75, the process of mixing and refining tapes after the recording of the original studio performance of the musicians has become almost as complex as the editing process that regularly occurs in filmmaking after the original filming of the actors.

Sound mixers commonly hold an occupational self-image that includes such elements of craftsmanship as technical mastery and artistry. A leading Nashville sound mixer describes his work in this way:

"A mixer is an engineer who takes all the instruments and voices from the recording studios and blends them into that perfect—or near perfect—sound. It is a little like baking a cake. Not too much flour; not too much sugar; just the right ingredients to come out with a tasteful product."²

Another mixer has explained why he thinks recording is artful:

RESEARCHER: In what way is recording an art?

MIXER: The answer to that is that the exact way you cause an instrument to sound or blend them together to create a final sound is the art that's involved. . . . In part how much volume he gives to each instrument at a particular time increases or decreases the dynamics of it—creates an interpretation of it that

wasn't in the original performance. How he emphasizes the tones that a guitar makes in addition to the basic note, because after all . . . each note on the scale has a tone and the harmonics will determine whether it's a saxophone or a violin. And enhancing these qualities is the art of the engineer.³

Both mixers make it clear that, while their skills are considered technical, the practice of such technical skills also involves aesthetic decision making in order to develop a standard for what sounds good.

Recently, sound-mixer trade journals have adopted editorial policies that encourage the mixer to be more self-conscious of his aesthetic contributions. One such editorial states:

As musical ideas and recording techniques have been refined, the demands upon engineers and producers have grown comparably, to the point where their craft is an art form in and of itself. Today their expertise with a fearsome array of concepts and hardware can easily make or break a record.⁴

As this commentator notes, the degree to which sound mixers have taken part in aesthetic decision making has increased during the history of popular recordings, with resulting changes in the aesthetics of music.

The analysis that follows adds the interactional dimension of collaboration and discusses how the changes in the power relationships among collaborators have variously restricted and facilitated the participation of sound mixers in aesthetic decision making.

MODES OF COLLABORATION IN RECORD PRODUCTION

As an occupation, recording has undergone processes of change and development, such as industrialization and rationalization, that are common to much of modern work. In addition, it has undergone a change that is less common: a decentralization induced by new technology. From this history have emerged three currently observable modes of collaborating on popular music productions: the craft-union mode, the entrepreneurial mode, and the art mode.

Each mode can be characterized in terms of the available technology of recording, the intended recording aesthetic, the social organization of studio collaboration, the job responsibilities of the mixer, and the associated occupational ideology of sound mixing.

Craft-Union Mode

The craft-union mode crystallized during the post-World War II era. During the war the technical needs of the combatants had generated im-

proved capabilities for recording sound information on discs and tapes. However, while this improved the range of frequencies that could be recorded, commercial recording processes remained relatively unchanged. The sound mixer's skill lay in using to advantage the acoustic design of the studio, deciding upon the placement of a handful of microphones, and mixing or balancing microphone outputs as the musical performance was recorded. Very little editing was possible, since the performance was recorded directly on a disc or single-track tape. The primary aesthetic question was utilitarian: How well does a recording capture the sounds of a performance? The technology at this time did not offer the sound mixer a wide range of discretionary choices during the recording.

However, the possibility of improved fidelity prompted record corporations to compete seriously with other media in presenting music such as live radio broadcasts and concerts. The companies encouraged their engineers and mixers to develop their craft skills and strive for a recording aesthetic of "concert hall realism" and "high fidelity." This required the construction of large studios and the development of microphone and mixing techniques in order to record whole symphony orchestras and dance bands in a way that simulated the psychoacoustics of a live performance. During this period, the major record companies promoted the recording aesthetic strongly through their corporate interconnections with the major radio networks and film companies, and thus were able to reach a mass audience.

The major media corporations' investment in research and development not only improved fidelity and standardized production processes, but also had a significant impact on the studio workers employed in corporation-owned studios—studios that recorded primarily for mass distribution. The work force was differentiated through a process of professionalization and unionization. Engineers with extensive technical backgrounds specialized in problems of equipment and studio design. In 1948 the Audio Engineering Society held its first meeting at RCA Victor Studios to "establish audio engineering as a separate profession." Those who performed the day-to-day work of recording worked under a chief engineer and were relegated to the status of engineering technician and given the title of sound mixer. Unionization therefore became an attractive alternative for the large corporation sound mixers.⁵ Not only did it enable them to negotiate better wages, but it also gave them increased control over their craft. Soon they controlled access to the technology of recording by forbidding collaborators, such as musicians, composers, and record company personnel, to even touch the studio equipment at recording sessions. And they controlled access to the skills of mixing by establishing union apprenticeship and seniority systems. At the same time, they required that all of a company's contracted recording artists use company studios exclusively.

Since studio musicians had also unionized, a salient characteristic of

recording sessions in large corporation studios about 1950 was craft union regulation. In addition, the dictates of the corporations' accounting and marketing departments further structured the relationships among collaborators and decided the pace of their work. The company designated an administrative supervisor to recording sessions, the artists-and-repertoire man or "record producer," whose duties included expediting compliance with the contractual provisions of the collaborators, coordinating their work, keeping the studio sessions within budget and on schedule, and selecting and arranging music to suit the company's intended audience. Thus, increasing rationalization in the studio accompanied the large corporations' investment in sophisticated production facilities.

The relationship among collaborators at such recording sessions tended to be formal and impersonal. The mixer recorded whomever the company brought before his microphones without regard for whether he appreciated the musical style or talents of the artists. Usually, the mixer had no musical training or experience; but, like any good craftsman, his interest was in improving the technical performance of his equipment rather than the musical performance of the artists or the market performance of the recording. His pay was the same whether the recording was a success or failure in the marketplace. Yet, a sound mixer's work was the means by which his collaborators realized their aesthetic and commercial ends.

The basic standard used to judge a sound mixer's work was whether the sound was "in the grooves." The good mixer-craftsman would make sure that unwanted sounds were not recorded or were at least minimized, that the desired sounds were recorded without distortion, and that the sounds were in balance. The recording technology itself, and thus the sound mixer's work, was to be unobtrusive so as not to destroy the listener's illusion that he was sitting in Philharmonic Hall rather than in his living room. The *art of recording* was not to compete for the public's aesthetic attention to *the art that was being recorded*.

Thus, the craft-union mode of production was a by-product of rationalization in the recording industry. Unionization gave sound mixers a defense against further encroachments by the professional audio engineer and further work demands by the record producers. However, it also gave them a defensive occupational ideology that locked them into a narrow, technical, instrumental role among their collaborators, who had limited expectations of them and allowed them limited responsibilities for the final product.

Entrepreneurial Mode

However, in 1949 two technological innovations began undermining the predominance of the craft-union mode of studio collaboration: television and tape recording. The rise of television to mass popularity occurred at

the expense of national network radio programming. The radio industry turned to local- and minority-taste programming, which previously had proved uneconomical. Such programming decentralized the creation of popular musical taste and made it more difficult for the major music corporations to shape it.

At the same time, studio technology suddenly became much simpler, cheaper, and more flexible with the replacement of direct-to-disc recording by tape recording. Since only a modest investment could now outfit a new recording studio, the ability to make recordings also became decentralized. Within five years of tape's introduction, the number of companies issuing record albums increased from 11 to nearly 200.⁶ During the 1950s the coincidence of the diffusion of these two innovations provided the basis for the growth of another mode for organizing studio collaborations: the entrepreneurial mode.

Small entrepreneurs could profitably record new or previously ignored artists and find an audience for them through radio airplay aimed at local- or minority-taste audiences. They could also, in the management of their companies, avoid the high union wages, strict work rules, and expensive technical standards that had developed at the large corporation studios. Some of these entrepreneurs owned and operated studios themselves; others simply rented facilities when necessary. Much of the rhythm and blues and rock and roll music that came to prominence in American popular culture in the 1950s and early 1960s was produced by entrepreneurial collaborations outside the major corporation studios.

The emergence of the entrepreneurial mode of collaborating brought with it a new recording aesthetic. The entrepreneurs, independent studio owners, and mixers who worked for them did not have the resources in terms of studio facilities, musicians, and music to compete with the recording aesthetic of concert hall realism and high fidelity. However, their intended audience—lower-class whites, blacks, and teenagers—was neither expecting nor familiar with such an aesthetic. The music familiar to this audience was played in improvised acoustic environments: the music of roadside dance halls, small clubs, and high school gyms. Only an ethnomusicologist would be able to appreciate reproduction of this music with "high fidelity."

The solution to the problem provided an opportunity for the entrepreneurial collaborators to create, with the technology and the music available to them, a new recording aesthetic that would develop in this audience an appreciation of studio recording as aesthetically desirable in itself rather than as an attempted simulation of a live performance—all of which encouraged innovation in using the limited studio and artistic resources: the use of echo and reverberation devices instead of cavernous studios, recording at loud volume levels, the use of novel microphone placements,

electronically altering the acoustic sound's waveform, and various forms of tape editing in addition to the arrangements for music and new lyrics aimed at the life-style of its audience. The aesthetic and commercial goal was to get a "hit sound" from the studio.

Accomplishing this often required that the collaborators work in new ways together. One of the most successful entrepreneurs of rock music, Phil Spector, described the nature of his collaboration with a sound mixer at an independent studio in the early 1960s:

"You really needed somebody good alongside of you, and Larry was really helpful . . . for what I was doing, he was invaluable. Everything was an experiment. We were breaking every rule there was to break like 'don't go over the red line with the needle' and 'watch this' and 'it's gonna skip' and who cares? . . . Just make the record."⁷

In contrast to the craft-union mode, with its emphasis on technical correctness, concert hall realism, and strict division of labor, the entrepreneurial mode is a more fluid and open collaboration which allows an interchange of skills and ideas among the musicians, technicians, and music market entrepreneurs. Laing thus describes the mid-1950s collaboration of entrepreneur Norman Petty and rock musicians Buddy Holly and the Crickets in terms of an integration of functions:

They combined within themselves . . . the role of song writer, musicians, lead and backing vocalists, and record producer. The recording was even done at Petty's own studio in Clovis, New Mexico. . . . Consequent upon this integration of functions was an integration of the musical elements within each song.⁸

However, this integration of functions also had important consequences for the sound mixer. In exchange for the opportunity to contribute to shaping the musical aesthetic, he also had to share his control over, and knowledge of, the studio technology with his collaborators. The craft-union rules, which restricted nonmixer access to the technology, did not apply in most of the small independent studios used by the entrepreneurs. One mixer summed up the consequences of this change by stating: "Then [in the heyday of the craft-union mode] the musician was fitted to the mike. Now the mike must fit the musician." In such collaborations the sound mixer acts more like a service worker who must please his clients without benefit of appeal to a set of craft standards enforceable through his union. Skill at selling studio features and techniques to collaborators became as important as skill at achieving good sound quality. Thus, the occupational ideology of these sound mixers expanded beyond that of narrow, instrumental, craft-union technicians to include a client-oriented, entrepreneurial outlook reflecting the new roles of salesman and producer of hit recordings.

Art Mode

Another important consequence of the integration of functions in the entrepreneurial mode was the integration of the sound of the studio technology with the musical aesthetic of popular music, for among the audiences for this new music was the next generation of rock musicians, and the studio sound of the music set up expectations of what rock music making should be. H. S. Bennett has shown that beginning rock musicians usually learn their musical values by listening to popular recordings reproduced by electromechanical media.⁹ The instruments they learn to play and perform with (particularly electric guitars and keyboards, and public address systems) are also electromechanical devices. As they practice with these instruments, they attempt to incorporate the sounds and arrangements of recorded popular music in their playing, developing what Bennett calls a "recording consciousness" before actually entering a studio. The result, as I. I. Horowitz has noted, has been that the modern generation of rock musicians realizes that "the gap between the engineering of sound and the creation of music has narrowed to a remarkable degree."¹⁰ Thus, the accomplished rock musician develops a natural interest in the craft of sound mixing as a means of artistic expression.

In the 1960s, further developments in recording technology facilitated the rock musician's involvement in the sound-mixing process. Tape recorders and tapes became multitracked, with as many as 24 separate tracks available on a tape. Each instrument could be recorded separately and then replayed and edited in minute detail. Rock pieces now commonly consist of built-up layers of such studio performances, which are remixed and reduced to a final master tape. The rock musician could record a performance in the studio, store it on tape, and "mix" it later, thus taking over one of the functions previously left to the skill and judgment of the sound mixer. Formerly, single-track recording required a proper and final mix to be accomplished at the time of the actual studio performance by the musicians. The consequences of the new technology had a critical effect on the sound mixer's ability to control the recording process. One mixer notes: "That's why I'm in favor of the 'back to mono' thing. It'd give more power back to the engineer because he'd have to do all the mixing in one take."

However, the rock star's successful annexation of the sound mixer's craft could not occur until the balance of power in the *work organization* of studio collaboration had shifted in the rock musician's favor. For when these musicians first began to obtain recording contracts from the major record corporations, they found themselves confronted by the craft-union mode of collaboration and the "hands off the equipment" working regulations of the sound mixers. Marty Balin, a member of a highly successful San Francisco rock group, recounted some of his earlier experiences in the studio of a major corporation:

Because of certain union requirements, Balin hasn't been allowed to touch the board while the group was recording. "What bullshit that is. If I even touched the thing, they'd cancel the session. They slap your hands. Wham. 'Now, now, now, don't touch that Marty.' Like I'm some fucking moron kid."¹¹

However, the equipment was precisely what the rock musician wanted to get his hands on.

In the mid-1960s the relationship between record corporations and popular artists underwent a revolution. Rock musicians developed the capacity to act as self-contained production units. Many formed groups in order to write, arrange, and perform their own music. After some preliminary experiences with working in recording studios, they often became less inclined to follow the editorial and administrative recommendations of company artists-and-repertoire men or independent entrepreneurs, especially when they realized that the use of middlemen substantially reduced their share of profits. One independent record producer explained:

"Groups want to spread their wings a little after they've been successful . . . If you're a success as an artist, it galls you to think there are other people who are taking 15 to 20 percent of what you do as an artist. And the thought is always in your head. 'Why do I need those extra people?'"

The revenues that rock musicians generated from the sale of millions of albums, publishing rights, and large-scale concert tours provided them with their own economic base in the music industry. Many artists used the newly acquired power to build their own recording studios and to establish their own record labels. From this emerged yet another mode of collaboration, even more antibureaucratic and anticraft union than the entrepreneurial mode: the art mode. A national recording manager's explanation of a major company's current policy indicates the rock musician's power in this mode of collaboration:

An established act will insist on going where he has been successful and we normally allow this. One of the reasons an artist goes to a particular studio is he likes to mix it himself or there is a mixer he has worked with and has confidence in. He doesn't want to change that system and you can hardly blame him.¹²

The distinguishing characteristic of art-mode collaborations is that middlemen representing the commercial interests of record companies or independent entrepreneurs are excluded from the studio production. The collaborators most directly involved in producing the popular music sound—the musicians, composers, and sound mixers—take responsibility for organizing the work to be done at the sessions and make the aesthetic decisions.

Often the rock star emerged as the ultimate arbiter in the process of determining what a good record should sound like. The standard for judging recordings is no longer a merely utilitarian one—that of capturing sound—

but rather a primarily expressive one—that of producing artistic sounds. One commentator notes: "Unlike on his *Something/Anything?*² album Todd doesn't play all the instruments. 'I play the studio this time,' he says."¹³ The rock musician views the studio equipment as practically another instrument.

As a result, the occupational ideology for sound mixing changed: work previously considered merely technical now became artistic. A look at the album cover credits of such rock stars as the Rolling Stones, John Lennon, the Beach Boys, and David Bowie demonstrates this fact. For example, the credits listed on one of David Bowie's albums—*Diamond Dogs*—read as follows:

Written, arranged and produced by Bowie.

Engineer Keith Harwood

Tracks 1–5. Side one; 3, 4, 5. Side two mixed by Bowie and Visconti

Tracks 6. Side one; 1, 2 Side two mixed By Bowie and Keith Harwood

Strings on "1984" arranged by Tony Visconti.

The credits make it clear that Bowie is in control of all major creative tasks in the production of the recording. He goes to the trouble of detailing authorship of the sound mixing; he notes the assistance of two people, one of whom—Harwood—is a studio sound mixer; the other—Visconti—is a musical arranger. However, Bowie takes first billing for the mixes of all the selections. The rock star thus announces to his peers, critics, and audience that his sound mixing work is part of his art. The transformation of the craft to an art is complete.

FROM CRAFTSMAN TO ARTIST

The intrusion of rock stars into the craft world of sound mixers has also had its effects on the careers now available to them and the possible rewards they can expect from their work. As Becker has observed:

When new people successfully create a new [art] world which defines other conventions as embodying artistic value, all the participants in the old world who cannot make a place in the new one lose out.¹⁴

The new convention in popular music, which makes sound mixing an extension of the musician-composer's art, has created the most problems for the craft-union sound mixers. They have found it difficult to accept the demands of rock stars who are often much younger than they are. One 48-year-old union mixer explained:

"At a rock mixing session you might have twelve people telling you how to mix. . . . Often a group has one member who plays four or five instruments and wants control of the mix so he can get all of his parts in. Well, that won't sound good on a car radio. . . . But you can't push it on a session. That's why I like to stay in disc mastering these days: machines can't talk back. . . . The old school

engineers and producers used to work with talent. Now you get guys in who just play loud."

As rock musicians became aware of the resistance, resentment, and lack of appreciation for their music by craft-union mixers, they turned more and more to the entrepreneurial and art modes of collaboration, with the result that less work and fewer opportunities for advancement have been available to such mixers.

On the other hand, the desire on the part of rock stars to integrate studio techniques into their music created a demand for young sound mixers who were totally attuned to the conventions of rock music. In fact, one of the best credentials an aspiring mixer could have was being an ex-rock musician from a small-time band. This situation has led to the emergence of a hybrid type of studio collaborator—an artist-mixer. Again, Becker has noted that where the art and craft worlds overlap, craftsmen tend to speak of themselves as artists-craftsmen.¹⁵ They seek recognition for their work beyond their in-group, although they must usually depend on the institutions of the ordinary craftsmen for their training and rewards. However, they hold an aesthetic ideology that goes beyond the utilitarian standards of the ordinary craftsmen and is in rapport with the aesthetics of the artists who work with similar craft materials.

In the field of recording, some critics have always insisted that sound mixing has an aesthetic dimension beyond merely capturing sound well. In 1956 one audiophile proclaimed: "I rate . . . the art of microphoning as the equal of any another interpretive art . . . the plain fact is that microphoning is an art unto itself with its own laws, principles, and its own special culture."¹⁶ Other critics have suggested that a mixer's training should include musical as well as technical knowledge and should take place in special institutes or in music schools. But not until the late 1960s—when younger sound mixers realized that the chance for fast career advancement lay in allying themselves with the new generation of rock musicians rather than with the craft unions—did sound mixers begin aggressively asserting the aesthetic importance of their work. A young (early 30s) part-owner of an important studio in New York stated in a trade paper:

The sound of today's record has become a much more important ingredient in the formula for a hit record than the hit of the 1940's. However, it is now more difficult for the arranger to exercise complete control of the final sound since now the engineer who may never have studied one note of music can improve on the arrangement, merely by adding one of the effects and that added effect could have more impact than the other two-thirds of the arrangement.¹⁷

In effect, some mixers began to develop and promote an artist-mixer ideology.

During this same period a new trade magazine appeared—*Recording En-*

gineer/Producer—which is, as its masthead states, “The magazine produced to relate Recording Art to Recording Science to Recording Equipment.” In one of its early issues the editors announced the engineer of the year, “who danced with his fingers [on the recording console].”¹⁸ The editors defended their analogy in an introduction:

We think the analogy is not too strained when we compare the artistry of a great dancer to the artistry of a great recording engineer. Such an engineer is beyond the elementary repetition of “It worked then, and it’ll work now. Why take chances?” just as the dancer is beyond carefully putting one foot in front of the other and merely walking. The techniques of the engineer and dancer are always growing, changing, expanding, in order to better express the music and feeling they deal with daily.

Significantly, the editors belittled the pragmatic, utilitarian standards of the ordinary craftsman and promoted an artistic aesthetic of experimentation and self-expression.

In this context it was not difficult for some mixers to put forth an artist-mixer ideology by claiming a total identity and equality with recording artists. They assert, “The recording engineer is another musician who has to know the score both musically and technically.”¹⁹ The corollary of this ideology of equality is that the sound mixer should share the rights and privileges of the recording artist’s status: royalties on record sales, and professional and popular recognition as an artist. For the artist-craftsman, then, the development and promotion of an art ideology for his work can serve as a proposal to the art world to negotiate new terms for collaborating.

In practice, however, having status as artist-mixer recognized and rewarded has been problematic for sound mixers because of their marginality to the institutions of the rock musicians’ art world. First, the reason a rock group values a mixer as an important aesthetic collaborator is often because of his special knowledge of “studio magic.” The more resourceful and innovative the mixer is in applying studio technology to enhance or augment the recording, the more indispensable he is as an aesthetic collaborator. For example, mixers who are proficient in programming Moog synthesizers to be compatible with other rock instruments have recently been much in demand. Conversely, the more knowledgeable the recording artist becomes about studio techniques, or the more simplified and accessible the technology becomes, as in the case of newer models of Moog synthesizers, the less the sound mixer is able to claim a unique store of aesthetic resources, and the less necessary he becomes as an aesthetic collaborator.

Second, the artist-mixer is also vulnerable to charges that he is not really an artist because he does not fully take part in what is conceived of as the essential artistic act. One mixer attacked the artist-mixer ideology of his colleagues by arguing that “the engineer isn’t playing the notes, he’s on the other side of the glass [studio window], he’s not in there with the group playing.” Being “on the other side of the glass” is symbolic of the mixers’

limited participation in the musicians’ subculture wherein they develop their aesthetic ideals or “recording consciousness.” Occupationally, the mixer is in a bind: sound mixers are typically affiliated with a particular studio while rock musicians are typically nomadic. Some aspiring artist-mixers have attempted to overcome the barriers to full participation in the rock musician’s art world by plunging wholeheartedly into their life-style. This strategy of assimilation presents its own problems:

“Then they want you to travel with them and do their sound on the road which isn’t always fun. And you don’t get much variety in sound problems. I know some of the younger engineers are doing this. But it easily goes to extremes. For example, there’s a certain world-famous group . . . whose engineer wants so badly to be one of them that he’s become a heroin addict too.”

The demands of such a life-style limit the successful aspirants to the free, young, and hardy among sound mixers.

A third related problem that the aspiring artist-mixer must face when he throws his lot in with a particular group of artists is the mercurial nature of rock star careers. Like all those who assimilate, the sound mixer’s destiny becomes tied to the host group’s. Unfortunately, the cultural riptides that keep various recording artists’ careers afloat often inexplicably run out, groups of collaborators founder, and the mixer is left stranded. As one mixer put it: “There’s no job security. If the group goes, you go.” Moreover, the taste for highly engineered music is neither universal nor constant among recording artists and audiences. Ultimately, the mixer who aspires to be an artist rather than a craftsman is subject to the same hit-or-miss career that plagues all those who attempt to create popular music. In general, the success with which an artist-craftsman moves from his craft world to an art world depends to a large degree on whether it is possible for him to abandon the established institutions and rewards of the craft world and successfully finesse the career contingencies of the art world.

During the early 1970s, several new institutions for rewarding mixers symbolically and materially evolved to accommodate the artist-mixer in his career. One important need that had to be fulfilled for the artist-mixer was that of making artists, critics, and audiences aware of his aesthetic contribution. Many of the rock groups who work in the art mode of collaboration in studio productions have recognized the new status of the artist-mixer by giving him artistlike credits on their record album covers. For example, the inner sleeve of the Rolling Stones’ *It’s Only Rock and Roll* album is devoted to their collaborators’ captioned photographs, two of which picture sound mixers at their recording consoles. In addition, record company executives have made it a practice to award gold records to mixers as well as artists in recognition of their contribution to the aesthetic success of the recording as reflected in consumer sales figures.

The problem that has proved to be the most difficult to solve for the

artist-mixer is that of receiving equitable compensation for his aesthetic contribution. Some recording artists have paid their mixers a bonus after a recording becomes a commercial success. Others have commissioned their mixers to design personal studios and public address systems for them. Mixers themselves are increasingly offering their services directly to successful recording artists as freelancers, at high fees, on a project-by-project basis. A few mixers have attained the ultimate artistic recognition that the music industry can give: a share in the royalties of record sales as co-producers with the recording artists. However, it is likely that artist-mixer careers will be institutionalized only if record companies and recording artists agree to provide royalties routinely to the sound mixer in addition to a recording session fee or salary.

Discussion of the artist-mixer's career problems indicates that for artist-craftsmen successfully to complete a transition from the craft world to the art world requires that the established art world agree to accept their ideology of artistic work, to recognize their work institutionally as art, and to make economic concessions to support it.

NOTES

- ¹ H. S. Becker, "Arts and Crafts," *American Journal of Sociology* 83 (January 1978), pp. 864-70.
- ² "The Unsung Heroes," *Billboard* (28 October 1967), p. 72.
- ³ Quotations accompanied by citations are from personal interview transcriptions.
- ⁴ P. Lawrence, "Synesthesia—Seen Any Good Records Lately?" *Recording Engineer/Producer* 5 (April 1974), p. 47.
- ⁵ Three unions have organized sound mixers: the National Association of Broadcast Engineers and Technicians, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Motion Picture Machine Operators.
- ⁶ R. Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965), pp. 299-300.
- ⁷ R. Williams *Out of His Head*? (New York: Outerbridge & Lazard, 1972), p. 71.
- ⁸ D. Laing, *The Sound of Our Time* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969), pp. 97-98.
- ⁹ H. S. Bennett, "Other People's Music," Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1972.
- ¹⁰ I. I. Horowitz, "Rock, Recordings, and Rebellion," in C. Nanry (ed.), *American Music* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1972), p. 269.
- ¹¹ T. Cahill, "Marty Balin Sings Again," *Rolling Stone* (8 June 1972), p. 8.
- ¹² E. Tiegel, "Unions' Engineer Stipulation Irks Independent Producers," *Billboard* (1 April 1972), p. 14.
- ¹³ "Half Notes," *Craaudaddy* (May 1973), p. 23.
- ¹⁴ H. S. Becker, "Art as Collective Action," *American Sociological Review* 38 (December 1974), p. 774.
- ¹⁵ Becker, "Arts and Crafts," p. 866.
- ¹⁶ E. T. Canby, "The Sound-man Artist," *Audio* (June 1956), pp. 44-45.
- ¹⁷ "Ramone Stresses Gain Made by Sound in Producing Hit," *Billboard* (10 May 1969), p. 51.
- ¹⁸ G. Koch, "Roy Halee, Engineer of the Year, 1971," *Recording Engineer/Producer* 2 (April 1974), p. 11.
- ¹⁹ "Recording Studios in Profit Pinch," *Variety* (2 December 1970), p. 1.

THE REALITIES OF PRACTICE

1980



COMMITMENT TO A SCHEDULE

The first consideration of the practice session is that it is a prearranged meeting, and there can be as many or as few sessions as the group cares to arrange. Observation of many groups shows that there is a great variation in frequency of practice schedules (from "never" to "every day"), and that the categorization of groups by their practice scheduling yields an indicator of group career stages. It is, of course, not the number of practices, but the ideological framework which creates a particular practice density that is indicative of the group's stage of development. When there is not enough material to play a three- or four-hour gig, the group is at an early stage, and the need for practice is great. If the "every day" schedule is actualized at this point, the shortest possible lag time ensues between the group's formation and the playing of its first gig. As the number of practices decreases from the practical limit (i.e., "every day," which means "almost every day"), the time it takes to construct a repertoire increases. Since the ability to accept an engagement depends on the existence of a repertoire, the practice schedule of a newly formed group determines its possibilities for succession to the steady-gig stage. It is, however, the fate of many groups to break up after initial formation because a workable practice schedule cannot be maintained. Here are some typical examples of nonmusical factors affecting the existence of group music.