STUDY GUIDE: Idania Valencia

This study guide is to support virtual and in-person classes for students and teachers inspired by the movie *Respect* about the life of Aretha Franklin.

Overview

Idania Valencia explains what a mastering engineer does and how her work relates to key aspects of the music recording and production process. As the 'final polish' in the recording process, Ms. Valencia explains how the technical and creative aspects of her job work together to create a sparkling, consistent sound, regardless of whether the listener engages the music from the radio, a CD, while streaming, or other audio medium. Ms. Valencia also shares typical paths and her path to becoming a mastering engineer.

Learning Objectives

- Students will create a web of benefits to music recording, mixing, and production careers from formal and/or informal music education experiences by writing journal-reflections, conducting research, and discussing their findings and opinions in small groups.

- Students will evaluate and defend their preference for live acoustic music presentations or professionally engineered recordings by discussing aesthetic qualities associated with each performance type in small groups.

Essential Questions for Reflection and Critical Thinking

- Recording, mixing, and mastering engineers do not sing our favorite songs, nor do they play the instruments that we love to hear. Nevertheless, their work is fundamental to creating a professional end-product. How do you think the formal and informal music making experiences of recording, mixing, and/or mastering engineers influences their professional decisions?

- Imagine you had the opportunity to hear a song performed by your favorite artist before and after the recording, mixing, and mastering engineers completed their work. In which ways would the song sound the same? How do you think the song would sound different? Which performance would you prefer and why?

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Suggested Student Activities

Activity 1.

Writing in their music journals, students reflect on transferable tools and skills they have gained through school and informal music education experiences. Once individual students have considered five (5) or more tools and/or skills as well as multiple applications of each, students examine the work of recording and production engineers (see resources below).

Finally, working in small groups, students create a web (digital or physical) connecting beneficial aspects of their music education experiences to skills necessary for successfully recording, mixing, and mastering music. Students present their webs in class or in another scheduled exhibition.

Recommended time allotment/scheduling: This activity can be completed in one class period but would be better served with two or three scheduled class meetings.

Activity 2.

Working in pairs, students identify a favorite song. Students identify two or more live, acoustic performances of the song – home recordings, YouTube, and TikTok performances are ideal. After listening to the song, students discuss aesthetic qualities that they find appealing and/or undesirable about the performance(s). Students then find and listen to a professionally produced performance of the song. Again, students discuss aesthetic qualities they find appealing and/or undesirable about this performance.

Students continue listening to and discussing these two performances until they can articulate and defend their recording preferences. Students should be reminded that this activity is highly subjective and that it's perfectly fine if they find they have changed their mind at a future date. Students should also be reminded that judgement of peers has no place in this activity.

Recommended time allotment/scheduling: This activity can be completed in one class meeting but may be well served by two (or more) class meetings.

Resources
The following websites can serve as valuable resources and references:
- https://www.sweetwater.com/insync/what-is-the-difference-between-mixing-and-mastering/
- https://emastered.com/blog/audio-mastering
- https://www.sageaudio.com/samples.php#jazz
- https://www.sageaudio.com/samples.php#soundtrack

Key Terms
Students should be familiar with the following terms:
recording engineer, mixing engineer, mastering engineer, aesthetic preference

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