

How To Record A Piano Album



AUTHOR

Arceryz

Game developer, mathematician, nature savor

Introduction

At the beginning of September 2023 I got the idea of creating a physical music album as a Christmas gift to my parents. At that time I was not regularly playing piano. I wanted to do a project that would give the songs I had learned in the past years a more solid place by means of recording them. In this post I go over the creation process from start to finish.

Musical Programme

I started giving shape to the project at the beginning of October 2023 by listing out the songs I wanted to play. Then I had to try and fit as many songs as I could on two 20 minute sides for a 33rpm vinylplate.

To do this effectively I created an Excel Sheet that counted the duration for each side with the songs I had selected. In this Excel Sheet, my friends who we're also performing could fill in the details of their songs aswell. In the end, the ordering of the songs consisted of simply changing a number in a row. This allowed me to squeeze every last second out of the produced plate (39 minutes and 54 seconds).

Track	mm	ss	Side	
Merry Harpsicord	1	24	1	
Prelude I in C major BWV 846	2	8	1	
Mister Blue Sky	3	22	1	
Oogway Ascends	1	39	1	
Hochzeitstag auf Troidhaugen, Op. 65 No. 6	6	54	1	
Lilium	3	50	1	
Waltz in A minor	0	38	1	
Married Life	3	50	2	
Jungle Book Theme Mashup	2	46	2	
Queen's Garden	1	48	2	
Theme From "SCHINDLER'S LIST"	3	30	2	
Hanging Tree	3	38	2	
Enlightenment	2	56	2	
The Legend	1	31	2	
Total	39	54		
#Tracks	7		7	
Seconds	1195		1199	

The Excel Sheet for track division

Of course, some songs still had to go before others or go in certain places to have the song order somewhat make sense as a whole. For example, Merry Harpsicord and Prelude in C Major had to go first.

Practice

With the programme in place, I rehearsed all the songs from the beginning of October until the end. The rehearsing, and later also recording, took place in one of three piano wing rooms at X in Delft, a sports and activity center on campus. From left to right: Dance Studio B, Music Studio and Theater Hall.



Dance Studio B



Music Studio



Theater Hall

My favorite piano is the Yamaha in Dance Studio B (first image).

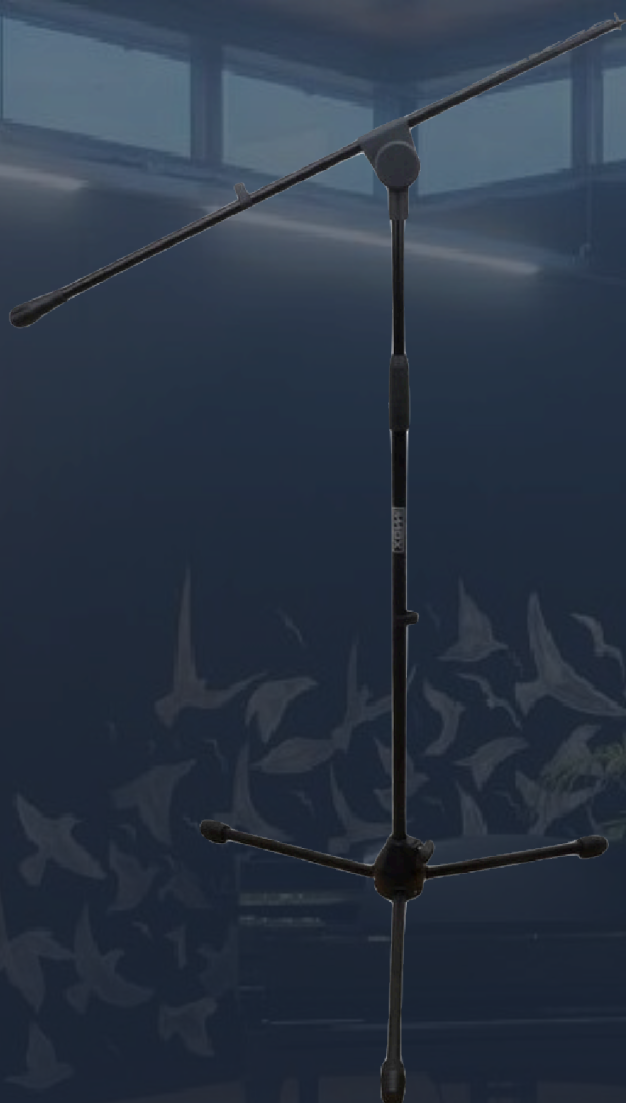
There were some difficulties to reserve practice rooms, as X only allows reserving each of these rooms once a day for an hour, which means I had to switch to different rooms if I wanted longer practice sessions. For recording this also posed a problem, but as we shall later see, I found a sneaky way of circumventing this limitation.

Equipment

To record a large piano, I had to find the proper equipment and learn how to use it. Due to the size of a piano, the internet recommended a pair of condenser microphones spaced one meter apart. After some research I settled for a pair of Rode M5 condensers with two microphone stands to hold them.



Rode M5 Condenser Microphones



Innox IVA 12 Microphone stand

This cost a total of €230,- but the investment was worth the effort. I still had a Duo Capture Ex laying around for receiving the microphone input and relaying it to my computer. This one is perfect for a pair of condenser microphones since it has exactly two inputs.



Duo Capture Ex

With equipment in place, it was time to move to the recording phase.

Recording

Recording all these songs in a weeks time also posed a slight challenge. I was in a hurry in particular because I wanted to order the plate soon, such that it arrived before Christmas.

The first day of recording was most memorable. This day was the first time I used all my equipment, and things we're not working yet. The Duo Capture has many buttons, of which some configurations lead to no sound output and others to only one ear. This left me scratching my head many times. In the end, I had to use batteries to power the Duo Capture, but they ran out quickly. It turned out it all had to do with Phantom Power on/off and USB/Battery power.

In the below video you can see the recording setup in action. This was for the recording of the piece *Mister Blue Sky* arranged by *Pelle Grit*.



On that Monday I had a friend record *Hochzeitstag Auf Troidhaugen*. It happened several times that the recording would be interrupted in the middle of the play because the batteries ran out. Time was running out for this day and my friend was not available on the other days. I hurried all the way to store to get a big pack of batteries. Then with some last desperate attempts I plugged everything in and the recording started, just in time.

This was the first time that I could listen to piano that I recorded myself. It was a victorious day and it set in motion the recording on all the other days. Every day, I travelled to X with all my equipment and there was three hours booked. I would be fortunate to finish recording two songs on one day, but some songs we're more troubling than others.



Recording of Merry Harpsicord on a Harpsichord

To save time recording songs with mixed long and easy sections, as well as short but hard sections, I chopped the recording of them in pieces. I recorded each section separately and would then later transition one into the other as best I could. This was better, as making a mistake towards the end would not require re-recording the entire piece. At this point I also discovered how to record without using batteries, which saved me a great deal of pain of battery management.

By next week, everything was recorded and I was left with 23 hours of raw

Parade This demanded some editing.



Editing

I recorded all my audio in *Audacity*, a simple program for all platforms, sufficient for my basic needs. I took the raw audio and isolated the final pieces from the practice ones. This was a long process. The final edit contained 39 minutes and 54 seconds of music. Imagine how 22 hours of recordings we're just for practice!

Of course I had slightly more than 40 minutes, since not all finished songs could fit on the physical album. I had to decide which songs to include, partially using the Excel Sheet I created earlier. But now I know the exact duration of every song, and not all of them are as long as predicted. To include a 14th song, I sped up *The Legend* by 5% to keep it within the time constraints. Quite noticeable but better than a blank minute.

That is how 14 songs made it in the physical 40-minute album.

Cover Art

An album is not complete without a case and a name. I settled for the name *Valkenvlucht* (English: Falcon Flight) very early, even before any plans we're made. I wanted to create a cover image representing the freedom of a bird's flight. This resulted in the front cover below.



The front cover

With the cover created I also designed a matching centerlabels and a back cover. These can be seen below.

I

- T. van der Valk 1. Merry Harpsicord
T. van der Valk 2. Prelude In C Major
P. Grit 3. Mister Blue Sky
T. van der Valk 4. Oogway Ascends
A. Zuiddam 5. Hochzeitstag auf Troldhaugen
T. van der Valk 6. Lilium
S. Deuten 7. Waltz In A Minor

II

- T. van der Valk 8. Married Life
P. Grit 9. Jungle Book
T. van der Valk 10. Queen's Garden
A. Zuiddam & N. Aretz 11. Theme From Schindler's List
T. van der Valk 12. The Hanging Tree
T. van der Valk 13. Enlightenment
T. van der Valk 14. The Legend

Recorded in collaboration with
Simon Deuten, Abigail Zuiddam, Nadyne Aretz and Pelle Grit.

The back cover



VALKENVLUCHT

TIMOTHY VAN DER VALK



I

Merry Harpsicord
Prelude In C Major
Mister Blue Sky
Oogway Ascends
Hochzeitstag auf Trolldhaugen
Lilium
Waltz In A Minor

The front label



VALKENVLUCHT

TIMOTHY VAN DER VALK



III

- Married Life
- Jungle Book
- Queen's Garden
- Theme From Schindler's List
- The Hanging Tree
- Enlightenment
- The Legend

The back label

For my own visualization I combined all the art in a mock up of what the final physical plate would turn out to be.



The final design

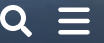
I was very happy with the way how everything turned out before this which made the last part the most fun.

Ordering

After all the preparation, recording, designing and planning, the day had come that only one production step remained: The ordering of the plate. This was done on the 5th of November through duplate.be. The production costs including the cover and shipping amounted to €120, quite pricey but well

worth the effort. This was the only company still producing 33rpm plates that is

Porcupine on the other side of the planet.



All that had remained was to wait. This made the month of December an even more exciting month.

Conclusion

Two weeks before Christmas, a surprise package arrived at my doorstep. I unpacked and was elated to see that the plate had arrived so early. The result was everything I had hoped it to be. Clear sound, beautiful cover and beautiful disk itself.



