

The Path to Better PC-Based Recordings

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When auditioning for a musical ensemble you will frequently be asked to hand in a recording of your playing. If you have access to a recording studio and technician then you have no problem. If you don't then that's another story. Luckily recording onto your desktop or laptop computer can actually be quite easy.

Software

The first thing you are going to need is some decent recording software. High-end software can range anywhere from \$500 to \$25,000. For those of us who don't have \$25,000 there is a free alternative called Audacity. Although it may lack some of the features a professional program has, it is easy to use and more than adequate for audition CDs.

In order to obtain Audacity either Google the name or go to <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

At the top of the page is a "Download" tab. Click it and on the next page choose the "Stable" (not Beta) download for your operating system (Windows, Mac, etc.)

Once the program is downloaded double click the file and follow the instructions to install. Once the program is installed the best thing to do is just start playing around with it. I will describe in more detail how to record a little later.

Hardware

Hardware will be your only expense and the price can vary greatly. You're looking for either a microphone with a USB plug, or a mic with an 1/8" stereo jack (like your headphones). It doesn't really matter what kind you get, but keep in mind you usually get what you pay for. A recording on a \$5 mic will sound like a recording on a \$50 mic. Usually anywhere between \$15 to \$40 is more than enough. In a pinch anything will do though.

The Studio

Believe it or not, the room you record in can make or break a recording. There are a few factors to consider when picking a room to record in.

1. You want the least amount of ambient noise possible. For example: cars outside, TVs inside, and people talking.
2. You want a room of small to medium size. You want it big enough to be comfortable, but too big makes the recording sound imprecise. A normal sized bedroom is perfect.
3. You need to be able to control the noise in the room. This means the other people in the house need to know you are recording and make sure to turn off any phones.

I usually use my spare bedroom for recording. I find the sound to actually be quite good. If the windows have curtains make sure to close the curtain, otherwise the sound will reflect off the windows.

Set-Up

The first thing is to set up your laptop or desktop computer in your “studio”. Make sure the keyboard and mouse are easily reached as you will need to use them a lot. Then set up your music stand and chair wherever feels most comfortable. Now you need to place the mic. If you don’t have a mic stand my quick fix is to use a piece of foam or Styrofoam and cut a notch out for the mic to sit in. You want the end of the mic to be clear of the foam and pointed towards your instrument. If you can avoid it, try not to have the mic resting on a desk or table that is in contact with anything that has a power source (like your computer). The vibrations from the power source will actually come through the mic and be recorded as a low humming sound.

Last but not least, hook up your mic to your computer by following the instructions that came with it. Open up Audacity and it should automatically detect your mic.

Recording

This is actually the easiest part of the entire process. All you have to do is press the “record” button at the top of Audacity and it will automatically create a new track and start recording. Press stop when you are done recording and voila! You have your first recording. Every time you record a track that you might use, save it. Even if it’s not perfect, save it anyway. It might be the best one you get.

Once you have everything recorded, use your mouse to highlight the sections of the recording you don’t want (silence at beginning and end). Press delete and they’re gone. Once you have all your tracks trimmed up, burn them onto a CD like you would any music CD. I won’t go into how to do that because I’m sure you’ve done it at least once before.

There you go, you’ve made an audition CD. Once you’ve made a few the process will become second nature. Don’t be afraid to experiment with settings in Audacity to try and get the best sound. Make sure to save often and in many different files to avoid losing your good tracks. If you have any questions, feel free to e-mail at jeremynoye@yahoo.ca

Good luck and good recording!!