

Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University Open Scholarship

Spring 2018

Washington University
Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts

Spring 2018

Synthesizers, Virtual Orchestras, and Ableton Live: Digitally-Rendered Music on Broadway and Musicians' Union Resistance

Liam Gibbs

Washington University in St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018

Recommended Citation

Gibbs, Liam, "Synthesizers, Virtual Orchestras, and Ableton Live: Digitally-Rendered Music on Broadway and Musicians' Union Resistance" (2018). *Spring 2018*. 44.

https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018/44

This Abstract for College of Arts & Sciences is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington University

Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2018 by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

SYNTHESIZERS, VIRTUAL ORCHESTRAS, AND ABLETON LIVE: DIGITALLY-RENDERED MUSIC ON BROADWAY AND MUSICIANS' UNION RESISTANCE

Liam Gibbs

Mentor: Todd Decker

As Broadway musicals embrace contemporary popular music styles, orchestrators must in turn embrace the digital technologies necessary for producing convincing simulations of genres like hip-hop and electronic music. At the same time, as production values soar, producers work to minimize their budgets, often putting downward pressure on the size of the orchestra. Although digital and electronic music technologies can expand the sonic register of the Broadway orchestra, they can also replace traditional acoustic instruments and save money. The Broadway musicians' union, Local 802, has regularly sought to control the use of digital technologies and ensure that live musicians produce as much music as possible. Thus, Local 802's advocacy for the employment of their members can limit the sounds heard on Broadway.

The following narrative considers three digital technologies—synthesizers, virtual orchestras, and Ableton Live—and examines case studies and controversies surrounding their use in Broadway orchestras. Informed by interviews with industry professionals, author observation of pit orchestras in performance, archival research, popular media articles, and previous scholarship, I argue that the union's entrenched interests and antiquated regulations can stifle musical innovation on Broadway by resisting the use of digital music technologies.