Project 1: Alice's Adventures in Mixcraft

Objectives
- Record a passage of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll and make it into a selection you might hear on an audio book recording.
- Learn how to record using a microphone and an audio interface.
- Learn how to automate volume controls to create fades.

Class Time Required
You should be able to complete this lesson well in three 45 minute sessions.

Procedure

1. Create a folder in your Music Technology folder on your flash drive.

2. Launch Mixcraft 6. Give your project name the title of "YOUR NAME Alice's Adventures in Mixcraft." In the Project Folder slot, hit the choose button and select the pathway to the file for your project. Then select Record Yourself or your Band from the New Project screen. You will see that you are given a template with eight Audio tracks. You only need two Audio tracks for this project, so you can delete the others. Select each one individually and click Track > Delete Track. It's easier if you scroll down to the last track in the Sequencer and delete them from the bottom up.

    You will also notice that Mixcraft gives you a time code in minutes and seconds rather than in bars and beats. If your timeline is in bars and beats, change it to minutes and seconds by clicking the Time button, which you'll find above the fader for the first track. Save your work so far. Remember to keep saving your work every few minutes as you work through this project.

3. You will be recording through a microphone, so if you are using speakers, make sure they are off, or you might inadvertently pick up the sound of the speakers while you're recording and create a feedback loop. You should use headphones to listed as you record this project.

    Attach your microphone to the input of your audio interface. Check the Sound Device tab of the File > Preferences screen to make sure that your audio interface is selected. In the title bar of the first track, click the down arrow to the right of the Arm button to make sure the correct channel is selected for your audio interface. Select Monitor Incoming Auido if you need to hear what you are recording through the headphones. This may cause some unfortunate delay between what you say into the microphone and what you hear, so it is probably best to leave the Monitor Incoming Audio option unchecked.

4. Arm Track 1. Speak into the microphone to make sure you are getting a strong signal. Watch the volume readout in the first track to make sure the computer is able to hear you well. If you are getting a very weak signal, you may need to turn up the gain on the microphone input on your audio interface. If your signal is too strong, you may have to lower the level.

    Be aware that your proximity to the microphone is also a contributing factor to the strength of your sound. The microphone should be just a couple of inches from your

mouth as you are speaking into it. Please note that it is never right to bang a microphone to see whether it's working. You can easily damage the microphone, headphones, speakers, and even your own hearing in this way.

5.   Press the Record button and read the following passage from Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Make sure you include the title of the passage, and try to get through the whole excerpt in one take. If you make a mistake, don't worry. Just press Stop and then Rewind to Beginning and click Edit > Undo or use the shortcut key combination CTRL + Z to undo the last recording and record again. You will learn about editing multiple takes in future lessons.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll
Chapter 7, "A Mad Tea-Party"

There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it. A Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep.

The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it: "No room! No room!" they cried out when they saw Alice coming. "There's plenty of room!" said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table.

The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he said was, "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?"

"I'm glad they've begun asking riddles. I believe I can guess that," Alice added aloud.

"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.

"Exactly so," said Alice.

"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.

"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least, at least I mean what I say - that's the same thing, you know."

"You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, "that *I breathe when I sleep* is the same thing as *I sleep when I breathe*!"

"It is the same thing with you," said the Hatter, and he poured a little hot tea upon its nose.

The Dormouse shook its head impatiently, and said, without opening its eyes, "Of course, of course; just what I was going to remark myself."

"Have you guessed the riddle yet?" the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.

"No, I give it up," Alice replied: "what's the answer?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said the Hatter.

"Nor I," said the March Hare.

Alice gave a weary sigh. "I think you might do something better with the time." she said , "than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers."

6.   Disarm the track. Press Rewind to Beginning and listen to what you have recorded. Click on the FX button beside the Arm button and add some effects to the channel. You might like to add in a compressor to smooth out the sound or perhaps a reverb. You might also like to add in the Acoustica EQ, which will give you more control over the EQ settings of your voice than the simple EQ in Mixcraft's Mixer tab.

7.   You can trim the beginning and end of your recording by resizing the clip. Hold your mouse over the beginning of the clip, near the top, until it looks like a double-headed arrow. Click and hold, and then you can drag the start of the clip left or right. Try to line up the beginning of your clip with the moment your voice starts to read. Trim the end of the clip the same way. You can then move the clip closer to the beginning of the track by dragging its name bar. Leave a second or two at the beginning.

8.   Listen to the start of the track and make note of when your recording gets to the end of reading the title of the book and chapter. You will need to add some background music to last from the beginning up to this point. Compose or improvise something. You can try composing or improvising along to the track to get a feel for how much music you'll need.

9.   Make sure the channel settings are correct for Track 2. Arm Track 2 and play your music. If your music is using an acoustic instrument, play your acoustic instrument into the microphone. You may need to get a stand to hold the microphone or have a friend hold it in in place for you. (Consult your instructor as to the best way to record your acoustic instrument.) Make sure you're getting a good signal. When everything is ready, you should press Rewind to Beginning and the Record. Try to record in one take, but if you need a do-over, press Stop and Rewind to Beginning again and use Edit > Undo or CTRL + Z to undo the last recording. Disarm the track when you have finished recording.

10.   Add some FX to the track. If you used reverb on Track 1, your should probably use the same reverb on Track 2, so it sounds as if the voice and the music were in the same place when they were recorded.

11.   Select the newly recorded passage by clicking on its name and then copy it to the end of the track. Select Edit > Copy or press CTRL + C, scroll to the end of the track, click somewhere in Track 2 near the point at which the voice recording finishes, and select Edit>Paste or press CTRL+V. Listen to the end of the recording and move the music clip to a good place, so it starts just as the reading ends.

12.   Press Toggle Automation button to the left of the FX button of Track 2. The Toggle Automation looks like a tiny line graph, and it will allow you to add some automation to the volume levels in the track. Find a point at which you would like the music in Track 2 to begin to fade and click on the horizontal line you see going through Track 2. Click again at the point at which you would like to fade to end, hold the mouse button, and drag the point down. You will see you have created points on the line, and you now have a descending line between two of those points. This will fade out the music, just like you would do if you brought the fader in the Mixer tab down. Scroll to the end of the track and create a fade-in for the music and a fade-out for the music.

13.   Listen to your work and check the levels of the voice and the music. The voice should always be audible, even when the music is playing. You can edit the level of each, either

in the automation lane of by using the Mixer tab. You can also pan your voice and instrument slightly left and right - separating them slightly on either side of center is a good idea. Make sure nothing peaks into the red. (This should be second nature to you by now.) When you are satisfied that your recording is the best that it can be, mix it down to an MP3 using File > Mix Down To > MP3. Make sure to play your recording of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland for friends or family members to see whether they like it.

Extensions

The passage used for this unit was taken from an abridged edition of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Find an unabridged copy of the text and find a longer passage to record. You could even try recording the whole of Chapter 7, "A Mad Tea-Party." As you record longer passages, you will need to use more background music. Select significant breaking points in the text to include some more music. You might add music where there are changes of scene, changes of character, changes of mood, and so on.