UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Winning Score

Engineering an audio recording for near-perfect sound begins with microphone placement. It seems like a simple task, until you consider all the different instruments and tones — large and small — that must be properly captured. Place the mic in the wrong spot and you risk the dreaded muddy audio.

And that's just the beginning of the intricate, lengthy process of sound mixing.

It's a process that UC Santa Barbara alumnus Alexander Lipay knows well. So well, in fact, that you could safely say he nailed it. The Recording Academy did.

A pro at microphone placement and all things audio when it comes to getting rich, balanced music from an entire orchestra, Lipay received a 2017 Grammy Award for his work on the sound mixing and production of a recording by the Seattle Symphony.

Lipay, who has been principal flute with the Tucson Symphony for the past decade, was recognized for his work as a surround mix engineer on "Dutilleux: Sur Le Même Accord; Les Citations; Mystère De L'instant & Timbres, Espace, Mouvement," a classical album of performances of four distinctly different pieces by French composer Henri Dutilleux.

"It is amazing and unbelievable to win this award," said Lipay, who has been involved with the Seattle Symphony since 2010. "It's definitely the highlight of my life right now."

Lipay, who graduated in 2005, is the only student in the history of the Department of Music to receive a dual bachelor's degree for performing on two different instruments — flute and piano. He credits the department with setting him up for success in his career. "Being a good and experienced musician is the most important quality for an audio engineer," Lipay commented. "The UCSB music department played a very important role in that regard."

"From his auspicious audition for entrance to the music program at UCSB, I knew Alexander was a sensitive and mature musician," said Jill Felber, a professor of music and Lipay's former teacher. "With his unyielding standards throughout his four years at UCSB and with his success as an orchestral flutist and soloist, I am not surprised that he is my first student to win a Grammy Award."

And that award was a team effort. Lipay often collaborates with his father, Dmitriy Lipay, an award-winning recording engineer who produces all of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra's recordings. Both were involved in the production of "Dutilleux: Sur Le Même Accord."

Though Lipay has worked on the sound mixes for other albums, this one, he said, proved uniquely challenging. "This release is interesting because it includes a very diverse set of compositions in terms of ensemble makeup," Lipay explained, noting that the album features both studio recordings and a live performance. "All these works require a completely different approach during the recording and post-production process. At the same time those completely different pieces had to be brought together into one cohesive album."

Creating a homogenous sound on an album of distinct performances was a daunting task, Lipay said, but winning the coveted Grammy Award made the hard work well worth it. Now he's ready for new challenges in both his performing and sound production careers as he looks forward to a fresh phase of creativity. "Producing a record is an art form," said Lipay.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society.

All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.