January 2, 2011

Chris Greenwell
Downtown Recording
515 S. 4th St.
Louisville, KY 40202

Dear Chris:

I am writing to express my appreciation for your spending your personal time on a Saturday (November 20, 2010) with my class, E536 “Applied Ethnomusicology and Folklore: Media Productions.” The course content examines the application of ethnomusicology and folklore training to media/multimedia projects produced for cultural institutions and commercial industries.

The tour of Downtown Recording studios and your excellent presentation were both informative and inspiring, and they left a lasting impression. The students especially were intrigued by the collaborative production process—the on-going exchanges between the studio and Donna and the complexity of and the interactive approach involving both the sound and video studios. They were impressed by the depth of your discussion as you illustrated the projects and of your response to their questions. The class came away understanding the level of commitment and skills as well as the type of attitude and temperament necessary to produce quality media projects.

I waited until the end of the semester to formally thank you in order to share the students’ feedback. Rather than attempt to summarize the impact of your presentation, I include a few excerpts from those who submitted electronic versions of class journals:

“It was inspiring to see the back-side of the production process. From the recording studio to the audio engineering room and the video studio, we were impressed by the high quality and professionalism of Lawrence’s production company. The audio was so beautiful and deep in that audio studio! But more than the gear, it was interesting to speak with the people running the equipment. They clearly are dedicated to their work, staying up long hours until a piece is perfected.”
“Getting to visit the Donna Lawrence production studios in Louisville, Kentucky was a great experience for both academic and personal reasons. Touring the studios helped give context to the various media productions we had been analyzing throughout the semester. It was amazing to see the crucible where these documentaries come from and the amount of equipment and experience that goes into them. Various individuals with different skills all play a part in a production team, so getting to meet the members of the Donna Lawrence team and have them explain their area of expertise was enlightening. The private screening of the Civil War documentary and others was very entertaining on a personal and informative level, due to the question and answer before and after each film. Overall, the visit to Kentucky solidified and gave a face to many of the media production theories we had been studying this semester. A sincere thank you to Donna Lawrence and all of her associates for their collaboration with our class.”

“I found our conversation with Donna Lawrence very useful. Her discussion of balancing issues of representation with the aesthetics of productions served as a useful lens in which to re-examine some of the productions we had discussed this semester. Her approach was brought into full-focus when we went to Louisville. I really enjoyed watching the Gettysburg film and hearing about Donna Lawrence’s production process from two new perspectives. All-in-all, the discussion and field trip served to allow our class to utilize Lawrence’s productions as a model for our future work in applied productions.”

“I think the fieldtrip to the studios in Louisville was very important because it allowed us to experience from first hand source how this processes are put together in professional settings. I was amazed to see how many equipment you need in order to create good quality productions. It was clear for me that when it comes to infrastructure, you can never reach a top... that is, there will always be more and more equipment to buy. The studios in Louisville were very well set up and it is always enlightening to see such studios in action! In the video studio I found amazing how the work with the music and images of the minorities presented in the videos (North American Indians, for example) were so balanced within the frame of the productions that were screened. If I could, I would very much like to do an internship there, to learn more about the production processes.”

“Thank you very much for taking the time out of your busy schedules to invite our class to your workspace. I speak on behalf of everyone, that it was very nice to see some of the real life environments behind the scenes of such fantastic media productions. We have spent so much of our course work studying the concepts and ideas behind such projects and being able to get a first hand glimpse into the working environment was very important and quite enjoyable. It seems as though the working team there has developed a very special collaboration, which seems to be equally as important as the creative talent and skills each individual brings to the table. I have been continually amazed by the particular aesthetic your productions achieve and strive to acquire my own intuitive sense within multi-media. I thank you very much for giving us a tour of your beautiful facility and for some of the insights into the creative process you all are involved in. I plan on a continued interest in your productions and have really valued what they have brought to our course. I hope for a continued relationship between IU and your institution and look forward to your future productions. All the best to everyone there and I hope you all have a great holiday season. Thanks very much.

“I would like to extend my personal thanks to both Donna Lawrence and Rachel Grimes for taking the time to visit with our class. After our meeting and hearing their presentation, one of the key points I gleaned from them was the notion of teamwork and collaboration as they key to all
productions; teamwork with both a complex network of production specialists, a council of cultural scholars, museum curators and designers, as well as with members and “gurus” from the represented communities. It is this community collaboration that lends credibility to the projects and I believe it is that “credibility” that leads to what Grimes describes as “authenticity.”

The quality of their productions is superior and it was a real treat to travel to Louisville and see how these projects came together. As students, many of us are working on shoe-string budgets and it is hard to even imagine what we would do if a major grant came through. Walking through the audio and visual studios in KY helped to exemplify why larger budgets may be needed and what sort of quality can be obtained when working with such qualified professionals. My sincere thanks to Donna Lawrence for setting up the visits and to Dr. Maultsby for making the trip a reality.”

Again, thank you for your generosity and an inspiring presentation. Attached are a couple of photos that I took on my IPhone during your presentation. Unfortunately, the camera does not have a flash and the images are not great, yet they provide a memento of the event.

Sincerely,

Portia K. Maultsby
Laura Boulton Professor of Ethnomusicology
Indiana University