Can recording an opera be anything but a partial documentation, a procrustean operation, or a lossy process excising the defining collaborative aspects of the form? If an audio recording of an opera is intended purely as a representation of the staged work then the absence of the visual and embodied aspects of the live production renders the recording inherently inferior to the original. However, another relationship between opera–as–performance and opera–as–recording exists.

This paper explores a redefined collaboration between composer and audio engineer through the lens of one recent contemporary opera recording. It examines the jointly articulated artistic goals of the new production, and steps though crucial points in the engineering process, explaining microphone choice and placement, critical mix issues, and mastering concerns.

For if the audio engineer enters into a creative collaboration with the composer or producer, then the audio recording ceases to be a flawed representation of the staged production. Instead the recorded work is re–conceived as a new iteration of the original opera. In effect, the recording becomes a brand new work in its own right, created in tandem by the composer or producer and the audio engineer.