Focusrite RedNet for Virginia State University

At Virginia State University, students are gaining hands-on experience with Focusrite's industry-standard technology, ensuring they train on the same professional tools they will use throughout their careers. This past April, students in VSU's Music Production Technology program recorded the university's annual Wind Symphony performance under the direction of Dr. Samuel Rowley (Chairman of the Department of Music, Director of Bands – Wind Activities and Professor of Music) with production overseen by Dustin Painter (Coordinator of Music Production Technology). The sessions were captured using a wide range of recording gear including Focusrite RedNet interfaces, ISA preamps, and monitoring solutions: these contributed to student portfolios, with VSU named the first Historically Black College or University finalist for the American Prize in Band and Wind Ensemble Performance.

Painter and faculty member Corey Brown (Instructor of Music Production Technology) designed the four year program to immerse students in real-world workflows starting in their first semester. The annual Wind Symphony recording serves as a capstone project, giving students hands-on experience in multiple stages of production: pre-production, system setup, signal routing, microphone placement, recording, mixing, and video integration.

"This project was more than a recording; it was a real-world teaching opportunity," said Painter. "Our students set up the entire system, managed levels, handled multi-camera sync, and even taped cables in their concert suits. They got to experience every detail of a professional classical recording session, and the Focusrite gear made it seamless. With Focusrite RedNet and ISA preamps at the core, VSU's students gain hands-on experience in professional workflows while capturing an award-nominated wind ensemble performance."

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The VSU team deployed a Red 16Line interface, multiple ISA 828 preamps with Dante connectivity, and RedNet MP8R remote-controlled preamps, feeding signals via Dante to the recording station more than 300 feet away. Additional Focusrite gear included RedNet AM2 headphone monitoring units and the RedNet R1 monitor controller, ensuring precise monitoring throughout the session.

The flexible Dante-enabled RedNet infrastructure allowed students to record simultaneously to multiple computers while feeding a livestream mix via a Scarlett 2i2 4th Gen audio interface. “When we heard the playback through RedNet, it was night and day,” Painter added. “Even in an…auditorium where the acoustics were less than perfect, the sound quality was pristine. It sounded like a professional hall.”

Painter emphasized that providing students with access to professional-grade tools is a core responsibility and mission of VSU’s audio program, so that their graduates are prepared for real-world industry experiences. “One of our primary goals is to ensure that students are fully prepared for any career path they choose, whether in studio recording, live sound, broadcast, or music production,” stated Painter. “RedNet shows up everywhere in the industry, from concert halls to live sound to broadcast studios. Having our students learn on this gear means they’ll be ready to step into any role after graduation.” The recording is currently available on the Virginia State University Music Department’s YouTube channel and will be one of the inaugural releases from the department’s forthcoming student-run record label, slated to launch next semester.

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VSU continues to expand its facilities with a Dolby Atmos 7.1.4 lab, with Yamaha recording console and ADAM Audio monitoring, as well as a stereo recording lab, synthesis and sound design lab, 12-seat electronic music lab, and a separate recording facility in the Academic Commons building, all connected using Focusrite RedNet. Painter and Brown are in the midst of designing and installing a campus-wide RedNet network, ensuring every student has access to the same industry-leading technology found in top-tier studios.

“Every time I’m ready to take the next step in pro audio, it seems Focusrite is there,” Painter reflected. “From my first Scarlett 18i20 [interface] out of grad school to the Red 16Line I use today, the reliability and sound quality have always been there. That’s what makes it so powerful for our students, they’re learning on tools they’ll use for the rest of their careers.”

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