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CHARM symposium 6:
Playing with recordings

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In addressing the interface between recordings and the professional practice of performance, CHARM's sixth residential symposium, held on the Egham campus of Royal Holloway, University of London, paved the way for the transition to CHARM's successor centre, the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP): 40-odd international scholars explored performers' and teachers' attitudes towards recordings, along with the ways in which recordings and the record industry contribute to both the maintenance of musical culture and processes of style change. Along with the varied perspectives offered by students and scholars of Western art music, the interdisciplinary nature of both centres was enriched on this occasion by two central panel discussions providing insightful perceptions from widely recorded performers. The symposium started off on Thursday afternoon with consideration of the record industry; Friday was reserved for examination of performance practices in relation to recordings; and Saturday morning closed with alternative approaches to the recording process, the study of performance, and recordings in culture.

Day 1: Insights into the early years of the record industry

The first two opening sessions were held together by a common interest in the early record industry as the foundation of the century-long history of recording. Martin Elste (Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung PK, Berlin) opened the symposium with two brief case studies, one of Mozart's Don Giovanni at the Glyndebourne Festival in 1937 and the other of Otto Klemperer's appointment in 1954 by Walter Legge at EMI, emphasizing how pragmatic decisions within the record industry bear upon performance style and recording practices. Second in line was Peter Martland (Pembroke College, Cambridge University), who addressed the development of early British recording history by examining artists' relationships with labels and the wider public through a variety of contracts, advertisement and marketing strategies and sales. Pekka Gronow (University of Helsinki) explored the birth and further implications of the concept of 'historical' recordings (in opposition to 'old' ones), focussing on the development of jazz traditions from the combined perspectives of businessmen and ideologists, i.e. collectors and historians.

After a short coffee break, David Patmore (University of Sheffield) presented an overview of the years between 1925-29, the heyday of the record industry, giving special attention to the impact of competition and the merging of companies on the development of record catalogues and recording practices. Nick Morgan (also University of Sheffield) traced the influence of the National Gramophonic Society, active from 1924-1931, on the development of record catalogues and, by implication, the ways the wider public has conceived of and purchased records of classical music up to the present day. Before the start of the day's panel discussion, George Brock-Nannestad (Patent Tactics) gave a brief intervention on the development of early playback technologies. The discussion panel, comprising the previous presenters and chaired by Eric Clarke (Oxford University), explored the themes touched upon earlier in relation to technological developments, marketing strategies, business decisions, ideologies and social capital, providing rich and varied perspectives for a lively

discussion about the development, current state and future of the record industry.

Dinner was followed by two presentations in the spirit of lecture-recitals. Arguing that performers generally draw interpretative qualities or stylistic features from recordings for their own performances, Ian Pace (Dartington College of Arts) illustrated from his own experience as a pianist how recordings can offer a basis for reflecting on and experimenting with unexplored performative directions in classical music. His lively descriptions of individual piano performances were aided by addressing familiar performance terminology in relation to features such as tempo, articulation, direction, structure, phrasing, dynamics, timbre, pedalling, etc., and further illustrated on the piano. The first day closed with composers Aleksander Kolkowski and Federico Reuben (PhD students at Brunel University), who, taking the symposium title more literally, illustrated the creative possibilities of combining old and new recording formats and playback technologies with a series of examples of their own performances and sound installations.

Day 2: Recording performance, performing records

The themes on the second day were more varied in nature than the day before, including studies of performance style, the use of recordings, and the experience of recording. The first session of the day opened with presentations of work in progress by three doctoral students at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Their projects involved the use of Sonic Visualiser, to the development of which CHARM has contributed, but in very different ways: Anna Kounadi is exploring performance style through a wide range of performances of a single work, Scriabin's second piano sonata; Dario Sarlo also analyses performance style but by a single performer, Jascha Heifetz, while Mizuka Yamamoto addresses the 'work' concept through a small number of interpretations of Cage's difficult Freeman Etudes. Interestingly, she addressed John Cage's statement 'Society is impossible' by posing the question 'How impossible is possible?' and discussing it through various performances of the piece itself.

Following the students' interventions, Anthony Gritten (Middlesex University) drew attention to recordings as time-saving devices that make labour more efficient while providing interpretive input to classical music performers where once there was only the score. In a quite different spirit, Mine Dođantan-Dack (Middlesex University), presented a set of reflections on listening practices related to classical music recordings in a paper read in her absence by John Rink. Her views on the possibilities recordings offer for performers' learning processes extend to listening in the context of research, so providing insight into the study of performance practice.

These early sessions, full of insights into the study of performance, provided the ground for the two central panel discussions to follow. Organised and chaired by Tim Day (King's College London), the panel brought together John Carewe (conductor), Robert Max (conductor and cellist), Ian Partridge (concert singer), Jeremy Summerly (conductor) and Susan Tomes (pianist), who apart from being successful classically trained performers have a wide recording experience, teach at prestigious conservatoires, write and produce radio programmes, and/or have published books on the subject. The issues raised during the first discussion were related to the performers' relationship with their own recordings. While they accepted recording as 'part of their job', and felt generally at ease with the recording process, some saw recording as a collaborative process to which they had to adjust on each particular occasion: the panellists stressed the importance of variables such as time, location, and their relationship with producers and engineers in the making of a successful recording. Aware of the nature of recordings as artificial representations of a moment, they didn't seem concerned about the amount of technological intervention; rather,

they emphasized the importance of creating an illusory experience through which the work of art was communicated. The pressure to meet the high expectations of record-listeners was perceived by some as undesirable, although they acknowledged aspects of the concert situation that make live performance a unique experience, quite distinct from listening to records. The performers also considered recording as a learning process, and the record as possessing historical value, as being representative of a point in their careers, and as an effective marketing device.

After lunch, the panellists returned to their places to discuss their experience of listening to others' recordings. They all seemed to agree that listening to recordings, if done critically, could be a powerful learning tool. They also challenged the assumption that composers' recordings should necessarily be considered the ultimate interpretive authority, and engaged in a discussion of the nature of performance tradition, which they illustrated with stories about their performative preferences, their teachers and students. All in all, the discussion provided an engaging and direct account of performers' perceptions of the symposium's object of study.

Matthias Arter (University of the Arts, Bern) started the closing session of the day, which concerned performer-centred approaches to analysis. Focussing on Beethoven's Fifth and his experience as principal oboist of the Basel Chamber Orchestra, he compared early historical recordings with historically informed performance practices, so challenging commonly held assumptions concerning the originality of the latter in opposition to mainstream performance practices. Amy Blier-Carruthers (King's College London) offered some thoughts on the experience of recording orchestral music informed by participant-observation methods and interviews with musicians working under Sir Charles Mackerras. Although the statements she collected expressed general unease about recording, she found that money, time, control and empowerment were the variables that most influenced performers' perceptions of the recording process. The day closed with a lively discussion prompted by the last paper, in which it became clear that evidence-based data, whether derived from historical documents, computer measurement, or scores, were preferred by this group to what were considered 'subjective' experiential data, despite the arguably constructed nature of all research data.

Day 3: Alternative approaches to recording and performance practices

The last morning offered a site for more unconventional research propositions on recordings. Andrew Hallifax (CHARM's transfer engineer) offered some insights into the recording process from the perspective of recording and balance engineers, a perspective surprisingly under-represented in musicological studies. He saw this partly as a result of engineers tacitly perpetuating, through their practices and utterances, the belief that their job is to capture live performances rather than constructing a virtual image of them. Oliver Senn and Lorenz Kilchenmann (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts) offered a second exception to the predominantly classical orientation of this symposium: their paper explored Bill Evans' use of overdubbing in his 1963 release 'Conversations with myself', and they illustrated several methods of data extraction that yielded promising results. Tony Harrison and Sigurd Slåttebrekk (Oslo-based recording engineer and pianist, respectively) took up the challenge of reproducing Grieg's 1903 Paris recordings, drawing analytical insights from the attempt to exactly imitate Grieg's nuances. Beth Elverdam (University of Southern Denmark) and George Brock-Nannestad (Patent Tactics) provided an anthropological approach to the perception and use of recordings within classical music. Their research approach, much in line with ethnomusicological practice, provided an alternative to most of the methods employed by other contributors to this symposium.

Final thoughts: from CHARM to CMPCP

Marking the point of transition to the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP), CHARM's final symposium provided an opportunity to reflect upon its achievements. The themes covered by the six symposia, running from April 2005 to September 2008, have been highly varied. Starting with comparative perspectives in the study of recordings, the first symposium established CHARM's interdisciplinary nature by combining scholars from traditional, popular and ethnomusicologies along with performance studies. The second symposium, held as part of the first Art of Record Production conference, focussed on the musicology of production, while the third offered insight into historical recordings and the art of the transfer engineer: both of these provided a meeting point for practitioners and scholars of the respective areas. The fourth symposium, 'Methods for analysing recordings', explored data extraction predominantly through computational approaches, whereas the fifth brought together a variety of approaches to the cultural practices and environments surrounding recordings, emphasizing popular as well as 'art' traditions. With their contrasted methodological and repertorial focusses, the different symposia have attracted markedly different audiences. This coming and going of people and trends is indicative of the growth of the young field of enquiry which CHARM has promoted and fostered during the last five years. Through its various activities, it has brought together musicologists and ethnomusicologists, performers, producers, recording engineers, collectors, archivists and even a few representatives of the business side of the record industry: all have contributed to establishing a solid basis for the academic study of recordings, and thus a foundation for the understanding of music as performance that is the goal of its successor centre, CMPCP.