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Out of the concert hall and into the control room: Mackerras and his musicians in the recording studio

Introduction

Today, I would like to talk to you about recording, surprisingly, and what some professional musicians think about it, but I can't talk about recording without reference to live performance, its great - and comparatively silent - other.

But, before I get into the specific topic that I've decided to focus on for this paper, it might help if I gave you a brief idea of what my doctoral research is about.

My research

Imagine you're sitting on the bus listening to your iPod, or similar higher-quality portable listening device: you're listening to a recording. You then alight on Waterloo Bridge to attend a concert at the Royal Festival Hall: a live performance. You might ask yourself if these two musical experiences are in any way equivalent and interchangeable. Is a recording simply a live performance, captured? And if the answer is 'no', then how and why are they different? I have been working on this problem by studying the live performances and studio recordings conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras, aiming in this way to explain how these two performing situations can be understood. In order to do this I've been looking at details of performances, and observing concerts, rehearsals, and recording sessions. Having found that many performance traits *did* vary relatively consistently depending on whether the occasion was a concert or a recording session, I asked Sir Charles, the performers, and production team members why this might be: how might they describe their approaches to and feelings about various different types of performance situation?

So that's how I got to today's paper: 'Out of the Concert Hall and into the Control Room: Mackerras and his Musicians in the Recording Studio'

Others have hinted at this

I'm sure we are all aware that Robert Philip, Tim Day, and Mark Katz (to name a few) have all made various important inroads into the discussion of how musicians feel about making recordings, how recordings and live performances compare, and how the existence of recording has perhaps affected performance style. My research builds on those foundations, but I will here focus on people who are related to Mackerras's career in some way, drawing from published sources and my own interviews and field-work.

What I'll outline

Let me give you an idea of what I'm going to outline.

Recordings are great. They're great to listen to at home, in the car, walking around. The last century of recordings has kept musicians and their performances alive. We can enjoy them, study them, they provide us with an aspect of history that would otherwise have been entirely lost. This is all great from the listener's point of view, but what do the performers think? Day and Philip have told us how the first musicians approached the recording horn – many with trepidation and anxiety - but surely in this day and age of

digital sound, satellites, space travel, stem-cell research, watching our favourite bits of the Olympics by pressing the red button, and surviving musically via the intravenous drip of our iPods, surely *everyone* is happy with recordings..? Aren't they?...

I feel a *tiny* bit nervous about some of what I'm going to say here, as this *is* a CHARM conference, and the focus for the last 5 years *has been* on the analysis of RECORDINGS. Don't get me wrong, recordings really *are* wonderful - for us academics, they've given us an invaluable insight into the musical past, they've allowed us to study performances repetitively and analytically, and I wouldn't be without them. The thing is, some performers these days don't seem to be so hot on them: they don't love making them, they don't often listen to them, and they don't think they're very representative. Hmm, so, we may have more of a problem than we thought....

In the pop world, recordings seem to be the main thing. I was watching X Factor the other day, and several people said their dream was to become 'recording artists', not pub gig artists, or football stadium artists. Usually, the concert is to promote the album, not the other way round.

In the Classical world, even though recordings are widely listened to, concerts still seem to be the main thing.

Although, I hasten to let you know that I didn't start my research having decided to put one above the other. I don't instinctively think that concerts are more *worthy*.

I didn't set out with the intention of setting up a hierarchy between concerts and recordings - I believe that I've approached my research with a balanced view, and whatever angle I decide to discuss my sources from, I hope I am still pretty unbiased. For example, when I got a call from the LSO the other week to do a recording session, I was pretty excited - probably as much so as if they'd asked me to do a concert. Though when I found out that it was to record the music for the British Airways Christmas Pantomime, I must admit the shine wore off just a *tiny* bit!

But, as far as the musicians I spoke to are concerned, the concert is what they're in the business for, and they seem to have pretty good reasons for seeing recordings as a necessary but less enjoyable part of their career.

Using my research I hope to be able to illustrate some of the main questions of this conference, including: how musicians use recordings, what they feel a recording actually *is* (in comparison to a live performance), their attitudes to making them, and what they feel the impact of recordings has been on playing style.

I will be drawing here from my observations of various projects with the Philharmonia, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the English National Opera and the Royal Opera House, amongst others. I was lucky and am very grateful for their generosity in letting me in and talking to me.

When I quote from my interviews, I will identify the musicians by their instruments (the violinist, the flautist, the tenor).

I'm doing my best to present the views of my sources fairly. Of course I take responsibility for how I've selected, compiled, and interpreted what I have found and been told, but the quotes themselves are representations of those peoples' opinions. That's what's really interesting about this kind of research - the subjects are not silent (if we made a judgement about what Kreisler did or why, he can't argue): being able to ask people about their performing practices can make things more complicated, but also so much more interesting!

I would also like to point out that when preparing a paper like this, it is inevitable that I can only give you a snapshot, shine a spotlight on one small area of musical activity, in this instance based in London at the beginning of the 21st century, and focusing on a conductor, some orchestral musicians and some people working in opera. So I by no means claim that the story I'm telling here is true of everyone everywhere.

How they use recordings

So, how do these musicians use recordings? What place do they have in their professional lives?

The fact that Mackerras has an interest in recordings is the very reason that my research has been possible. Out of everyone I spoke to, he certainly likes recordings the most. As an opera conductor, with so much to think about and keep together on the stage and in the pit, he felt that the best way of assessing *his own* performance, whether he was getting what he intended out of the performers, was to record the broadcast concerts from the radio and listen to them. They were a learning tool.

Before he even began to make his own recordings, he was learning from them. All the way out in Australia in the 1930s and -40s, high-quality productions of opera, especially, were few and far between, and his main musical teachers were the great masters captured on record.

In 1959 he wrote an article entitled *What Records Have Taught Me*¹, in which he explains: 'during my musically formative years the gramophone taught me more than any live performance ever could.' 'Listening to records has had a more profound effect on my musical education and outlook than almost anything else.'

His biographer, and cousin, Nancy Phelan, describes him as often wearing headphones, listening for hours on end when he is at home - 'if the maestro is at home there is music from morning till night'.² He's always acquiring the latest bits of kit in order to listen to recordings (he quickly got one of the first Walkmans to listen and prepare on planes on the way to engagements, or for cheering himself up when ill, or even to accompany him through his hernia operation.)

Once he became an experienced conductor, he used recordings in other ways. He told me: 'to save myself having to read through scores which I know backwards, I often study instead by listening to a recording; usually my own or one that I admire particularly and that I would always do more or less exactly.'³ He also feels that recordings are important for young opera conductors, in terms of getting to know the opera, and also for learning about un-notated performance traditions, such as in Verdi and Puccini, for example.⁴

These days, he is so busy that he is often not able to attend live concerts - he's always conducting them - and so he uses recordings to keep abreast of what is happening in the musical world today. 'We are now expected to perform in Rome, London and Cape

¹ Charles Mackerras, *What Records Have Taught Me*, *Records and Recording*, October 1959, Vol. 2, No.1, p.11 & 50:

² Phelan, Nancy, *Charles Mackerras: A Musicians' Musician*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1987), somewhere between p.213-217.

³ Personal Communication: Interview with Sir Charles Mackerras, conductor, February 24th, 2006.

⁴ Charles Mackerras, *Opera Conducting*, in Bowen, José Antonio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.65-78.

Town all in one week, and I find more and more that my only chance to really enjoy listening to music is to sit at home, relaxed, and hear the finest performances, both old and new'⁵ from recordings.

Quite a few other musicians turn to historical recordings to learn from the great performers of the past. And Alfred Brendel, who has worked with Mackerras for many years, in an interview with Harvey Sachs, describes that he also sometimes listens to older recordings of himself to see what he should improve, or retain; just as Mackerras does.

What is a recording?

So, what is a recording, then, for these musicians?

It would seem that the main thing to remember about a recording is that it is not simply a captured live performance – it is a completely different thing. Performers have explained this to me in a variety of ways, and producers and engineers seem to see it as a process of 'transformation'.

Mackerras feels that a concert always engenders a different feeling to a recording studio: he says 'there's a sense of occasion at a concert, always, that must inevitably be lacking at recordings[...] It *definitely is* a different feeling.'⁶

The production team's main concern is, of course, the making of the recording, but in order to do this they must consider how to manage the transition from the live concert to the studio.

The producer Michael Haas writes: 'A studio is not a concert hall and a recording is not a concert'⁷ [...] 'As with "live" theatre and film, the differences (in both means and ends) between recordings and concerts are so vast, that they are hardly the same art form, but we *can* enjoy both without needing to set one above the other.'

[...]

He continues: 'translating a performance into a recording requires special skills', and changes need to be made such as 'adjusting the audio perspective and shaping the tempos, balance, and dynamics to match the recording medium.'

[...]

'The producer is a facilitator, translating the "stage-drama" to the aural equivalent of cinema.'

A producer and engineer who have both recently worked on projects with Mackerras also use the term 'transformation'.

The engineer says that 'a recording has to make up for the fact that you can't see the performance.'

The producer explains that 'there's a great argument always in recording, musical, and record label circles about what the truth of a recording *is* and what the truth of a recording *ought* to be. In other words: if you're making a studio recording, is that a

⁵ Charles Mackerras, What Records Have Taught Me, *Records and Recording*, October 1959, Vol. 2, No.1, p.11 & 50:

⁶ Personal Communication: Interview with Sir Charles Mackerras, conductor, Thursday, December 14th, 2006.

⁷ Michael Haas, Studio Conducting, in Bowen, José Antonio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.28.

different kind of reality from a concert situation?’ He describes a recording as ‘having to cheat the ear into thinking that it’s hearing something in a real environment when in fact it isn’t.’ He highlights the benefits of the recording process, by saying that although turning a live performance into a recording *is* a process of transformation from his point of view, it is a ‘totally positive experience’, allowing musicians to improve their performance and achieve results they would not otherwise have been able to. This point of view may be shared by many soloists or chamber musicians, where they *do* have more time and freedom to sculpt their preferred recorded performances, but for the orchestral musician that I have mainly dealt with, this might be an optimistic and not wholly representative view of the situation as they see it.

Andrew Hallifax, in his book on recording, sums it up well:

[There is] a need for translating music into the recorded medium [...] As John Culshaw explains, “An artist who can be exceptional in the theatre cannot necessarily reproduce the performance in recording-studio conditions...Communication with an audience...is an entirely different exercise from communication through a microphone to a domestic audience.”⁸ If the recording process is not merely one of capturing the sound of a performance, each member of the recording team and each artist must be complicit in making the transition from the concert hall to the living room.⁹

As for performers, when asked to comment on their experience of live concerts and studio recordings, they all answered that the two situations were completely different: when asked if a recording should approximate a performance in a concert hall, one replied ‘It just doesn’t!’; in another musician’s opinion, the two are so completely different that it’s ‘almost pointless comparing them!’; one feels that different performing situations affect you differently, be it a concert or recording or radio broadcast, and you have to take different things into consideration; and another says that when doing a recording, ‘you’re in a completely different place (mode) mentally’ than when performing live. In general, where live concerts are ‘an event’, studio recordings are ‘plastic music’ and ‘sound the same every time’; where concerts are about ‘expression’, recordings are about ‘balance and accuracy’, you have to ‘tense up, focus, and get it accurate’; where concerts are ‘thrilling’ and ‘each night is different’, recordings are a ‘manufactured product’; one says that concerts are ‘fabulous, but then you go into the studio and it’s not so much fun’.

The violinist describes the situation: ‘in a concert, off you go - anything could happen [...] a great musician brings different things out in each live performance.’ He says that at the beginning of the last century, people would get dressed up, have a meal, and go to a concert – it was an occasion – whereas now they go to the pub, have a drink and then go home and put on a CD. This is an unfortunate state of affairs, because as far as he is concerned ‘there is no replacement for a live performance.’

Another feels that only a concert allows you to do what is really important, which is being expressive, saying: ‘Music is a vehicle for human expression.’

It is the event, the venue, the audience (or lack thereof), the method of working, the technical expectations, and the final result, that make the two performing modes different from each other - in fact, it would seem that the only thing that remains constant is the

⁸ [John Culshaw, *Putting the Record Straight*]

⁹ Andrew Hallifax, *The Classical Musician’s Recording Handbook*, (London: SMT, 2004), p.41.

fact that the same musicians are playing the same music, but with every other factor being different, it is no surprise that the results might also differ.

Attitudes to making recordings

I will now talk about musicians' attitudes to recordings.

So we've already seen how opinions to live concerts and recordings compare. What else do they say about recordings?

I will describe the most general feelings of the musicians I have spoken to by creating a character that is a fictional composite. This musician is passionate about her music-making, and highly engaged in, and thoughtful about, the various aspects of her career. For her, as we have seen, live concerts and studio recordings are two completely different things – they affect her differently, and she has to take different issues into consideration. She without question prefers performing in live concerts: recordings are a necessary part of her career, but are less enjoyable by far. Traditional recordings are more lucrative than concerts, but are disliked for their emphasis on balance and accuracy, as opposed to the concert which is preferred for its emphasis on expression. The orchestral musician feels that her power over the music - her control of the performance - is largely taken away from her in the recording studio, which is one of the main reasons for preferring the concert experience. She feels that the audience play an important part in the energy of a live concert, and that is where she feels she makes her most important musical contribution - she generally dislikes listening to recordings of herself, and does not think that they are truly representative of her performances (although when working on a chamber or solo recording, she feels she has more control over the process and the final product, and so is happier with the result). She is, however, open to other media for the dissemination of her music-making (for example broadcasts, internet streaming, other new technologies), and sees the development of 'live' recordings as a largely positive thing, as a format which, although it also has its drawbacks, is closer to a happy compromise.

Recording:

So, to focus specifically on making recordings:

All the musicians commented on the specific recording projects that they have lately worked on with Sir Charles, which they all described as much more positive experiences than usual. Let's look more closely at their opinions about and descriptions of typical recordings sessions.

Recordings are in decline: they are time-consuming and expensive to make, and even the best orchestras are doing fewer of them than they were 20 years ago. The Philharmonia was once the biggest recording orchestra in the world, but now recordings are, 2 of them say, 'going down the pan': about a decade ago, they were making 30-40 discs per year; it is now down to about 6. This is because the record companies are no longer providing the big budgets necessary to record (especially operas), and so often private funding has to be secured before a project can go forward. For one musician, this 'slow demise is not a wholly negative thing - most musicians don't sit around being sad that they're not doing many recordings'; and another says she 'doesn't feel the lack of making recordings' in her life. All the musicians agree, however, that one positive thing about recording is that it is more lucrative: 'they *do* pay more'; 'it's better paid - easy money'; 'it's an inverse relationship: the most demoralizing work is the best paid, and the most artistically valuable or stimulating is the worst paid'.

For the violinist, a typical recording session is 'stitched together [...] sometimes recorded bar by bar – it's *awful*.' Many small factors dictate what it's going to sound like - the mics, the room, how cold it is – and 'if you're not in the mood it can be a misery'. It doesn't matter if it goes wrong, because they can do it again, but then 'new problems rear their heads', and 'many artists don't give their best in recordings'.

The flautist would much prefer to talk about concerts than recordings, as she doesn't do very many, and doesn't seem to like them very much (at least in comparison to concerts). She describes that when a recording is worked on in smaller sections, 'chopped up', the experience is 'not as nice', it is difficult to deal with, but it *is* 'easier to concentrate on the little bits'. She thinks that the fact that you can do multiple takes is not necessarily very helpful, because 'if you can't play it, then 15 times will be no help; but if you *can* play it, then doing it two or three times can mean that you get a really nice result [...] You always want it to be good: a recording is more relaxing, but not so thrilling – live is more exciting.' When speaking more specifically about experiences of making solo or chamber recordings, she explains that 'you try to recreate a concert feeling [...] you're going on a journey, but you have to keep going back and doing bits again, which means you might lose beautiful moments that you would have had, had it been live.'

The trumpeter hates making studio recordings: he says that 'artistically they are not a good experience.' He thinks that they are 'fundamentally dishonest', and dislikes that they focus on balance and accuracy, which 'are not the heart of the music'. 'In a recording, you might do three really nice takes, but then they say "but now we're going to move a microphone" and you have to focus all over again: it's really hard to continually and repetitively focus like this.' But he says he is still 'idealistic' – he still likes to try to think that he's 'making music' when making a recording, but he 'doesn't know if everyone still bothers to'.

The recording studio - power and control:

One of the main reasons that musicians have negative feelings about the recording process is that they do not feel they have much power or control over the process or product, which is quite a reversal if we consider that when on the concert platform, they are the ones playing the notes, making the sounds, they are in control. It may appear as if the conductor is in control, which is true if the orchestra likes and respects him, but any orchestral musician will tell you (or conductor, for they are equally aware of this) how easy it is for an orchestra to decide to ignore a conductor and take the power for themselves.

It would seem that where a musician has more control over the situation, they are happier recording: conductors and chamber or solo artists seem to be more comfortable as they have more direct contact with the producer, and can work in their preferred manner (stopping when they're tired, insisting on another take, even if there is not much time). However, an orchestral musician is much more at the mercy of the process (and the producer); there are too many of them for everyone to have their say (for instance, our flautist is much happier with the level of control she has over technical and musical issues when working on the solo and chamber projects which she manages herself). So your opinion about recording differs depending on who you are and what you are doing. There are even further subdivisions in how musicians feel about this: within the orchestra, the strings are more comfortable in their massed unity than the woodwind and brass in their exposed soloistic roles.

The musicians here expressed certain dissatisfactions with the situation in the studio. The flautist sees a hierarchy in the recording studio, the first tier being the conductor, soloist/s and producer - the 'important people' - and the second tier being the orchestral musicians and the engineers - those who 'just go with the flow'. The trumpeter feels that in the studio the approach is 'thrust upon you by the situation and the producer'. The process and the expectations limit and define what you can do musically. The comments that are made in between takes are about balance and accuracy ('out of tune', 'not together'), and never about music (they don't say: 'I didn't like that phrasing' or 'that tempo should move on a bit'), and the expectation of perfection is the most prevalent thing. When asked how much control he felt he had over this process, he answered that orchestral musicians were 'at the mercy of the production team'. He gives an example of a recording session where they did 19 takes of a hard trumpet line, and they were all good except for one, and in the final edit, for whatever reason, he exclaimed: 'they picked the *bad* one!!'

This feeling of being at the mercy of the producer and the process is common. On a flippant note: someone pointed out a funny comment in an Observer article to me lately: now, it was in relation to pop music, which is why I can get away with repeating it, and I emphasize that this is a *joke*, not my personal opinion. It goes: 'What is the difference between a producer and an engineer? One twiddles knobs and faders whilst the other pretends to know why.'¹⁰ I'll let you decide which is which.

Recorded balance:

A main area where musicians feel they lose control is when it comes to the recorded balance; of course they know that the concert hall balance cannot be exactly reproduced on a recording, as there is the unavoidable technology in the way, but this knowledge does not stop them from feeling somewhat disempowered. One tells me 'You can't judge the balance because others are in control of the dials', although the flautist admits when asked about her relationship with the microphone that 'a good engineer can make anything sound good'. The violinist says that 'the balance will be totally different - even if it was a live concert recorded straight, it is never unedited, because the microphone is always *somewhere*. It is intervention by definition.'

Of course, everyone involved in a recording has their own interests at heart and wants to make sure that not only are they giving their best possible performance, but that they can be heard. However, it is a typical comment in recording circles that singers are brought forward in the mix for playbacks. This is ascribed to the fact that as soloists, they are listening out specifically for themselves and do not want to be lost in the mix (although some would simply say that this is really about ego). However, this turning up of the singers for the playback is usually then corrected for the final mix (although singers and instrumental soloists will still always sound 'closer' than in a live situation) – one instrumentalist said that in one instance, she couldn't hear her solos because the singers were too prominent, but the engineers told her not to worry as it would get fixed later. The trumpeter feels that in comparison to the concert hall, the balance of a recording 'is different because the producer makes it so': the levels are set so that you hear instruments that would be 'un-hearable' live, for instance, 'In a recording of a Mahler *tutti*, if you can hear the 2nd oboe, then he's been turned up.'

¹⁰ Nitin Sawhney, The Observer, Sunday 2 March 2008, Review section, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/theatre/comedy/story/0,,2261382,00.html>.

The audience:

A quite obvious factor that is lacking in a recording is the audience. This has an important impact on the performers.

The flautist says that the audience 'has a huge effect on you', and that they are different all over the world; however, in specific reference to playing in an audience-free studio, she says that she has 'been doing it so long' that she 'doesn't think about it any more'.

For the violinist the audience have an effect on his performance: if there is a big name musician performing and it is a knowledgeable audience, 'you have to try a bit harder'. Many factors affect how you play: 'name, venue, programme, rehearsal time'

The tenor feels the lack of an audience in a recording session, and he deals with this by finding someone in the recording studio to sing to (even though that person will not normally be aware that they are being used in this way).

Are your recordings representative?:

One of the most revealing responses given by the musicians was when they were asked if they felt that a recording was a true representation of their playing. When asked 'what do you feel is the value of recordings and why do you make them?' one musician simply answered: 'it's part of your job'. Not only do they all seem to dislike the recording process in some measure or other, they feel that the recorded results are 'not representative' of their playing, that the recording is a 'dishonest' trace of their performance. They do not seem to be satisfied that despite their long careers as performers, it will be their recordings (and not their concerts) that will be left to posterity.

The trumpeter was asked: 'Do you listen to your own recordings? Are they representative of you', and replied: 'I try not to think about them in terms of posterity, because they're *not honest*.'

The flautist does not think that her recordings are a good representation of her playing. She 'hates listening to herself', and gives the example of a recent Desert Island Discs programme in which Sir Simon Rattle said that 'Listening to your own recordings is like a dog going back to sniff the mess it just made.' She adds: 'this is a good description'.

The violinist does not like listening to his own recordings, and he is not sure he would even buy the recording he recently made with Mackerras, even though he has 'enjoyed making it.' 'I would rather be remembered for all the other things I do than for my recorded sound'.

These are important revelations. Now, it might just be that they are shocked by what they sound like, like hearing your voice on the answering machine. But I'd like to give them rather more credit than that – after all, it *is* their job to make sounds, and to be aware enough of those sounds to manipulate and improve them. So maybe, as we move from studying historical recordings to looking at more recent performances and recordings in the age of digital editing, we might need to keep in mind that recordings might not even remotely be the final word on musical performance.

The impact of recordings and their contribution to process of style change

I'm now going to address the impact of recordings and their contribution to process of style change.

As far as I can see, the impact of recordings and their contribution to style change can be viewed from several perspectives. I'd like to focus on 2, which I call the short-term and the long-term. The short term is when going from the concert platform to the recording studio, and the changes in playing style that this might immediately inspire. The long term is of course larger-scale changes in performance trends over time.

Short term:

So, as soon as you set foot into the recording studio, you have a bunch of new factors to contend with, and they can have an immediate impact on your playing. The engineer has noticed that 'if people know they're being recorded, they play differently – it's not evaluable.'¹¹ And then once in the studio, after hearing the first playback, everything changes again.

Looking at this forms a large part of my research. Not everything changes, but many things do, possibly including the timbre, acoustics, balance, the declamatory style and characterization, vibrato, phrasing and articulation, dynamics, tempo, dramatic pacing, and accuracy.

I'd love to talk about this in more detail, and play you some examples, but unfortunately that would be a whole other paper.

Long term:

The main long-term impact of recording that musicians working today identify is the expectation of perfection

All the musicians said that recording has influenced the public's expectations to such an extent that perfection of execution is now seen as not just the ideal but the norm. Any concert-goer knows that even the most exciting, masterfully-played concert by one of the best orchestras is not going to be completely flawless – we would never expect it to be. There will be wrong notes, but this is something we are willing to accept because we know that the people playing the instruments are only human, and are trying to play to the best of their abilities.

However, because in the recording studio a passage can be repeated until it is right, and any mistakes can be edited out, people have become accustomed to hearing perfect recorded performances, a perfection which is simply not possible in reality on the concert platform.

It seems, though, that bit by bit we may have come to expect more and more perfect performances, unthinkingly, *even* in the concert hall. It *is* true that over the century playing *has* become increasingly technically accurate. This is partially attributed to people being less comfortable with hearing mistakes upon repeated playings.

¹¹ Personal Communication: Interview with recording engineer, Tuesday, August 21st, 2007.

Recordings have therefore influenced live performance, creating the 'expectation of perfection': 'recording has affected live performance' in such a way that the public now expect a perfection which the musicians are at constant pains to deliver. However, for musicians at the summit of their professions (which those interviewed most certainly are), although accuracy is of course very important, and they strive for it, perfection is not seen as the central factor in a live performance: one says 'perfection is never seen as the most important part of a concert - in a concert it's expression [...] As an orchestral player at 7:30 you just have to sit down and do it'; in a concert, 'you sacrifice perfection for the event'. They feel that the 'level of perfection' and the 'expectations of accuracy' 'have been created by the record industry', and that 'it's a pity that recording techniques have led people to expect perfection live.'

However, this preference for sacrificing perfection for the energy of a live event does not extend so far as a willingness to release completely unedited lifelike recordings. The trumpeter admits that although he loves the expression of the live concert best, he 'couldn't live with releasing a recording with mistakes' (for instance an unedited live performance). He uses the example of recordings made by Nimbus, which were done with one microphone and no editing: he says 'they got quite a following, but the recordings sounded terrible.' Although the approach is a more honest one, it just didn't sound good enough, because 'the market has been cultivated and we've been trained to want something that's physically impossible live.'

The violinist has a different opinion of the Nimbus approach though. He did some work for them and felt that being able to play ' swathes of music' was 'more true to the occasion'. He thinks that the performers 'are more into the music' and 'more relaxed', and that the resulting performance had 'more vibrancy' and was 'far more exciting'.

For the trumpeter 'the concert platform exposes you like nowhere else' and 'performance is about standing up and doing it', which implies that there is great merit in just being able to make great music without the intervention of microphones and production and editing. Looking at the bigger picture, he describes the situation prevalent until recently in which the possibilities of recording technology have created a false posterity - previously too many careers have been built on recording, thanks to the miracles of editing and production (more than one musician refers in general to people who have been known to record a bar or a note at a time - although this is a worst case scenario). He feels that the fact that the recording companies now have less money means that only the people with real merit (who could get up and do it in the concert hall) are getting the recording deals - this to him seems fairer, less dishonest.

How things are now

Our trumpeter leads us nicely into talking about how things are now and how they might change in the future. He explains that 20 years ago the record companies had a strangle-hold: they were the money and they made the artistic decisions, not always very good ones. At least now the decisions are made by the orchestra - they're self-governing - so they can more often work with people they're artistically happy to. So things *are*, in a way, getting better. But they're still not great.

He feels that it is important for people to know, that I would be doing musicians a favour by demystifying this, if I could show that they think the recording situation is highly unsatisfactory. Basically, even the biggest and best orchestras are in a way a victim to

the *status quo*: they're not getting the time and money and support necessary to give them the opportunity to really get something they're happy with down on record.

'Live' recordings:

Orchestras are now finding new ways of making money, one of which is by making and releasing so-called 'live' recordings. This entails recording the live concert, but there is still some editing involved, as any mistakes are patched-in by using parts of the rehearsal or if necessary being re-taken in a patching session.

With the decline of traditional commercial recording, these are now a financial necessity - they are much cheaper to produce - but they *are* also artistically preferable for some of the orchestra-members.

The producer says that live recording (speaking specifically about the LSO) is 'quite controversial. I would say 80% of the orchestra thinks it's just great, then there's probably 10% that *really* don't like it very much, and the other 10% are ambivalent.'

This mixed attitude is probably not surprising, considering the mixed nature of this mode of performance/recording. The engineer posits that whilst 'live' recording could be seen as offering the best of both worlds, it equally 'could be seen as possibly the *worst* of both worlds, because the musicians aren't comfortable with the hybrid performance situation, the clash of two mutually exclusive performance modes.'

The musicians are divided in opinion about this new hybrid performance situation - but the majority view it relatively positively. One musician thinks that 'live' recordings are 'really scary', but not as frightening as live broadcasts, but on the whole she likes them, and thinks that 'successful ones are really nice.' Another of the musicians interviewed hates 'live' recordings. He says that for a radio broadcast you know what you're getting into, you know what it is for (several thousand people, although it is still 'tough, very scary' when broadcast live); for a recording, you know; but for a 'live' recording, as it's neither a normal concert nor a recording, you just don't know how to approach it. You have a rehearsal and a concert, which means you have only two tries to get it right - this is 'very stressful', and means that 'recorded concerts have not been as exciting and vibrant as they could have been.' One of the non-string-players interviewed sees a distinction between how various orchestral groups view the situation: he says that strings would prefer just the live concert recorded, with no edits, but the wind and brass want to have it covered, because they are so much more exposed. They still like the immediacy of the live, but can't live with the obvious mistakes. Despite these distinctions though, he feels that 'live' recordings are 'more honest'.

SO with this new situation, recordings are now influencing performance in the sense that the existence of recording is invading the concert hall. Musicians can no longer be as uninhibited - again, perfection creeping in. This genre is mostly welcomed as an alternative to a straight recording session, but *it also* has its problems.

A solution?

So, what's the solution to this recording situation which some feel is unsatisfactory? I have neither the time nor the expertise to really offer a cure, but I'm sure it has something to do with money, time, and control or empowerment - as do most things in life! It will also have something to do with what we all think a performance really should be - perfect, or expressive?

This is something that I think will need to be opened for debate in the near future, for Classical music to be really successful; something that will need to be grappled with by the players, singers, conductors, orchestras, managers, producers, record companies, and even the listeners, the consumers...us.

Conclusion: is this research relevant or important. What can we learn? Why should we care?

In conclusion, it really seems that the more you do, the more you delve, the more you feel you've only really just scratched the surface. 3 years and a little PhD soon seem inadequate time and space to find out and do and say all that you wish to.

I *do* feel that perhaps I've found a little patch of common ground here - I'm interested in finding out about something that musicians seem to care about, and hopefully part of what I'm doing when writing about it is telling a story that they're too busy to tell themselves.

Not just using them as guinea pigs, but also having the results of my work hopefully do something for them.

Several performers I've spoken to are interested in this kind of research area, of how the interests of scholars and performers might intersect. They're interested in how they might benefit from what we're doing as much as we benefit when they let us through their usually closed doors.

With the arrival of the Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice, I am looking forward to future projects - both my own and other peoples' - which (like I have tried to achieve with this) will address research areas that are of mutual interest to both academics and performers, that will be equally useful and interesting to both parties: collaborations with new approaches, ideas, and outlooks. It is a very interesting time for all of us.

Thank you

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