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The twenty-first century is filled with a seemingly endless supply of recorded music. This brave new world was almost unthinkable to those who witnessed Edison’s technological marvel, the phonograph, when it was first released. The drama and emotion in the language used over the years to discuss the nature of recording, reveals the range of reactions to this technology. Glenn Gould compared the invention of recorded sound to the invention of the atomic bomb.1 John Philip Sousa said, “These talking machines are going to ruin the artistic development of music in this country.”2 David Sarnoff saw in this technology the power to create a corporate empire while touching the lives of virtually every American.3 Modern day lovers of music no longer see recordings as some strange “other.” It has ceased to be a novelty and is burned into every aspect of modern life. Perhaps this is why Mine Doğantan-Dack dwells at length on Edison and his 1878 discussion of the future of the phonograph in her introduction

to this anthology of reflections on the effects of recording on music.⁴ Edison’s list of important uses of the phonograph, originally printed in the *North America Review*, included recording music only incidentally. By contrasting Edison’s flawed imagination of the future with the reality that capturing music has become a major use of recording technology, Doğantan-Dack presents the reader with an inkling of how large a shock the idea of recording was in its infancy, and a clue that her book focuses on first principles and basic questions.

The multi-authored *Recorded Music* is broken up into five themes. The first six chapters deal with “Questions of Ontology and Aesthetics.” They focus on various questions about the aesthetics of recordings and their meaning in relation to live performances or the “musical works” they represent. The second section, “Genre-Specific Studies,” includes investigations into how these questions intersect with the specifics of jazz, rock, or classical recordings. The third section, entitled “An Ethnomusicological Interlude,” features a single entry by Robert Reigle. Reigle’s subject, questioning the meaning and purpose of ethnomusicological recordings, is so vast that his argument is at times hard to follow for someone not already familiar with the current literature. The fourth section, “Sound Recordings and Naturalized Epistemology,” deals with questions of how analysis of recordings might be useful for examining performance styles. It also takes a brief look at how recordings might be studied in an empirical manner, by actually measuring aspects of sound and investigating it using charts and graphs. The final section of the book, “Practicing Music, Recording Music,” features performers writing about their own connection to recording and how they have incorporated it into their lives as complete musicians. Questions about electroacoustic music are treated in the last two chapters in this book, which are admirably very wide in scope.

Writing about issues related to recording have only recently gained acceptance in the academic community.⁵ In the last two decades, growing interest in this topic has lead to several books discussing aspects of recording. There have been memoirs by some of the recording industry’s leading producers; histories of the companies and executives that created the recordings purchased by millions; and of course many, many volumes devoted to which recordings are the best, the most popular, or worth listening

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Most related to the questions in Recorded Music is Setting the Record Straight by Colin Symes. Symes uses evidence from the entire “ecosystem” of recording—including magazines, news articles, advertisements and album covers—to explain the changing contexts and meanings given to recordings over time. Symes contributes his own chapter to Recorded Music. Recorded Music also cites Mark Katz’s notable monograph Capturing Sound, a compelling and well-researched exploration of the profound effects technology has had on all aspects of modern music making. Also important is Robert Philip’s work, which considers changes in performance style that can be attributed to the influence of recording. Perhaps closest in spirit to Doğantan-Dack’s volume is The Audible Past. In this text, Jonathan Sterne provides a kaleidoscopic look at all aspects of recorded sound in modern life, including films, and even the telephone, in addition to the more obvious records and radio. His cross-disciplinary approach results in a bibliography that cites experts in a dizzying array of academic fields.

An additional text to offer a variety of perspectives on the topic of recording is Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke and others’ Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music. Published by Cambridge University Press, the Companion seems destined for more bookshelves than Doğantan-Dack’s work. Comparing Doğantan-Dack’s book to the Cambridge Companion, a reader will find that Recorded Music has a philosophical approach and is based much more on first principles then the Cambridge volume, which includes academic but practical essays about questions related to recording. Fully half of the Cambridge book’s 340 pages are personal reflections, rather than academic pieces. Words like “ontology” and “epistemology” appear in Recorded Music with regularity, which might prove tough going for the casual reader. Still, Editor Doğantan-Dack’s call for performers to be more connected to the discourse on the meaning of


7 Colin Symes, Setting the Record Straight.

8 Mark Katz, Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).


recording is partially answered by the inclusion in the Cambridge book of what the Cambridge editors dub “personal takes,” short personal essays in which musicians reflect on various aspects of the recording experience.

While the Cambridge Companion does deal with some of the same questions and cites some of the same books as Recorded Music, the latter is far more compelling as a work of academic scholarship. Each author in Recorded Music shows his or her familiarity with the relevant literature and discusses various opinions in some detail. In addition, Recorded Music includes extensive bibliographies and discographies, separate indexes for names and terms, as well as brief biographies of each contributor. Indeed, Recorded Music promises, and for the most part delivers, something not found in any of the previously-mentioned works. In short, editor Doğantan-Dack brings to the reader an examination of some basic philosophical questions that the prospect of recording raises.

In addition to the text, Recorded Music includes a CD featuring a performance of the second movement of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata op. 13, Pathétique, as performed by Mine Doğantan-Dack. Dack’s own chapter argues that performers’ knowledge has been undervalued in musicology, and her words try to illustrate the decisions made in her performance. The CD also includes soundscape works by John Young, Sabine Schäfer, and Joachim Krebs.

The first section of Recorded Music focuses on questions of what actually occurs when listeners turn on a recording. In the classical music tradition, there are performances of musical works. These performances occur in time, and once over, can never be accessed again. The time-bound nature of musical art, unlike literature or painting, creates a basic problem. After a performance of Igor Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto is over, does the music still exist? We have access to the score, but the score is not exactly the same thing. Nevertheless, virtually all serious consideration of music has been rooted in the score, for the simple reason that the score is easy to study, and performances prior to recordings could not really be studied at all. The advent of repeatable performances (recordings) changes this conception quite a bit. This is where Mine Doğantan-Dack’s book shows both its usefulness in adding to the academic literature and the advantage of having a variety of authors. Amongst the many subjects covered here one finds three intriguing questions: Is a recording really a performance, and does its repeatability change its meaning? Might differing musical traditions have different answers to this question? And do recordings or the arguably unique conditions of the recording studio play a role in performers’ interpretative decision-making?

Recorded Music’s authors give a variety of answers. For example, Andrew Kania takes a great deal of care in looking for distinctions between jazz, classical, and rock recordings. He eventually comes to the conclusion that rock tracks are not just
performances fixed in time but the actual artworks of that musical tradition themselves.\textsuperscript{12} He also argues that classical recordings can be seen as a distinct kind of performance, one that has notable differences from traditional live performances. Kania believes that a recording made in the studio is essentially the same as a recording that was made “live,” but Anthony Gritten and Colin Symes make different assumptions. Dorottya Fabian’s entire chapter investigates whether there are empirical differences in recordings made with the two approaches, as well as noting that the perspectives of performers, listeners, and music theorists are quite different when considering this question.\textsuperscript{13}

One pleasure of reading \textit{Recorded Music} is following the kernels of ideas as they appear and develop in very different chapters. After reading two chapters that cite the work of Theodore Gracyk, for example, readers will find Gracyk’s own contribution to the book, “Documentation and Transformation in Musical Recordings.” Gracyk argues that even with advances in recording technology the documentary aspect of recordings will never disappear. Gracyk wrestles with the opposing view espoused by Walter Benjamin in 1935, which claimed that technologically mediated art would lose its “aura” of authenticity.\textsuperscript{14} In another recurring theme, Gracyk takes time to debate whether different tracks on the Grateful Dead’s 1969 album \textit{Aoxomoxoa} can be considered “recorded performances,” or artworks in themselves meant to be heard through speakers.\textsuperscript{15}

Another recurring subject in \textit{Recorded Music} is the pianist Glenn Gould. In her chapter, “Classical Sound Recordings and Live Performances,” Dorottya Fabian examines Gould’s studio recordings of the Goldberg Variations alongside a live concert recording from 1959 to try and determine whether studio conditions had a major impact on Gould’s interpretations.\textsuperscript{16} Most of the mentions of Gould in the book, however, do not engage with Gould as a pianist but with his philosophy of recording and his predictions about its future. Gould was a strong proponent of recording and argued vociferously in his 1966 essay, “The Prospects of Recording,” against notions that recordings were somehow less authentic or provided a less meaningful experience than

\textsuperscript{12} Doğantan-Dack, \textit{Recorded Music}, 12.

\textsuperscript{13} Doğantan-Dack, \textit{Recorded Music}, 232.


\textsuperscript{15} Doğantan-Dack \textit{Recorded Music}, 75.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 247-248.
live performances. These questions are dealt with most systematically in Symes’s chapter, “Variations on a Theme of Nelson Goodman as Arranged by Glenn Gould for the Piano Phonograph.” Symes seeks to examine Glenn Gould’s philosophy of recording through the lens of Nelson Goodman’s philosophy of art. Despite Gould’s passionate defense of recording as a true and better way of making and experiencing music, musicians to this day generally believe that the ultimate stage for music is live performance. Symes reminds readers of this through his remembrance of the career of conductor Sergiu Celibidache. Celibidache believed that recording rendered music “flat and mediocre.” He believed in the power of live performance so much that he stopped making recordings at all. Symes goes through the possible philosophical questions regarding recording with much attention to detail. Still, it is remarkable how much energy Symes expends to end up with similar conclusions to what Gould came up with in 1966. Of course Gould wrote in a breezy, ironic style, and the discussions here are all done with academic sincerity. Symes presents his arguments with compelling evidence in a way the essentially self-educated pianist never did.

Recorded Music doesn’t spend all of its time in the clouds with philosophy and theory, however. Several chapters explore practical questions of how people interact with and use recorded music. For example, what happens when you take improvisations and fix them onto a record to be listened to as if they were written compositions? What about if you write the improvisations down first? What if you write them down, and then have them performed by an entirely different person? Michael Frith delves into all of these questions in his chapter, “Donner l’Illusion de la Chose Ecrite: Reflections on Recordings of Organ Improvisations.” An even thornier problem and a bit of the bizarre fill Bruce Ellis Benson’s chapter “Stealing Licks: Recording and Identity in Jazz.” This chapter is an example of how Recorded Music delves into very practical issues, but with an academic lens. At the beginnings of the jazz age, musicians were reluctant to record, because they were afraid others might steal their licks. As Benson relates, this fear was legitimate because the transfer of jazz licks from person to person was greatly accelerated by the growth of recordings. Given that jazz music, like all western art forms, places a premium on originality and personal expression, this might have posed a problem that would have disrupted jazz from

18 Doğantan-Dack Recorded Music, 41-60.
19 Doğantan-Dack, Recorded Music, 43.
20 Ibid., 119-136.
21 Ibid., 137-154.
growing as a genre. Benson demonstrates the seriousness of the potential problem by relating the strange story of what are generally acknowledged to be the first two jazz records ever released. Both were the subjects of multiple lawsuits over the ownership of the musical ideas on those records. The magistrate in the case had to make a decision incorporating such testimony as one expert who said that any blues number was the same as any other, thereby rendering any sense of ownership to the particular song moot. Despite these strange events, jazz musicians continued to record, and other players incorporated what they learned from these recordings into their own playing.

While this book is a fascinating take on various issues, no single volume can tackle everything. Looking in the index, one will find results for the words “iPod,” “MP3,” and “multimedia,” but Recorded Music does not include any discussion of the questions involved with the explosion of file-sharing technologies. The documentary quality of recordings, whose decline in importance is chronicled here, is often an important consideration for music lovers looking for content on Facebook and YouTube. It might also be a factor in the resurgence of vinyl. How that may change listeners’ perceptions of future recordings is a question left unexplored by the volume. Also, the power of anyone to reach millions through the internet, without any industry support, also is changing the world of music considerably. With the economics of the recording industry now in flux, musicians involved in popular music genres are rethinking the primacy of the studio in their activities, some once again making live performances their bread and butter. The digital revolution can also create a separation between creators and their work. Anyone with untitled tracks on their iPod or who listens to undocumented videos on YouTube knows this all too well. Given that both William Echard and Bruce Benson in their respective chapters express worry over the disconnection between even physical media recordings and the musicians that create them, the present day situation of purely digital music must be of even greater concern to those interested in the ontology and morality of recordings. Finally, several of the chapters included here could easily be expanded to form entire books. While Recorded Music is a strong work of scholarship in a neglected area, we will have to wait a bit longer for an academic look at these twenty-first century developments.

For Further Reading


