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Issues of Documentation and Experience in Re-Issuing Historical Recordings

I begin by stating the conviction that serves as the foundation for this paper: namely, that the original format in which a recording was made and/or was commercially available has something important to contribute to the experience of that recording, and that ideally reissues of such recordings would find ways to make that experience possible for those who encounter historical recordings in modern formats. One way of making this point would be to ask, "Is the essence of a recording found in the sound it produces?" In some ways it would be comforting to answer this question affirmatively. Certainly I would argue that in many contexts the ontological status of a recorded performance must be seen as independent from that of the composition it reflects. But just as any recording of Beethoven's 5th will inevitably have the score of the work as a point of reference, so too it seems clear that recordings also have connections (1) to the performers who initially fashioned the sound that was recorded, (2) to the engineers and their equipment—the "mute interpreters" of the performers' contribution, and (3) to the commercial commodity that first enshrined that recording and made its public dissemination possible. Unfortunately, it seems that this last point is not sufficiently understood, since attempts are underway to digitize large archives of recordings, with the potential that original formats may be discarded and forgotten. In my view, this is akin to throwing away the Old Hall manuscript because it's been photocopied and transcribed. Although the expense involved in storing and preserving recordings in their original formats is considerable, my experience as a collector and listener prompts me to wish to maintain an obvious connection between the sound that is recycled and the details and nature of the original product. The historical performance movement offers an apt parallel here: Bach's Second Brandenburg Concerto may be an entity that reveals a considerable portion of itself in any performance of it, but using "original instruments" can provide a stimulating, illuminating, and fruitful standpoint from which to engage with the music. Similarly, knowing the discographical details concerning the original format of Caruso's "Spirto gentil," and knowing what it's like to hear that recording as played from an original copy (how's that for an oxymoron!) provides a perspective that CD-only listeners can hardly grasp. "The only reliable guide into the future will always be the primary source,"[1] claims Alfred Mann, and although the complex ways in which historical recordings are primary sources must go unexplored in the present discussion, I do hope that my comments will touch on some concepts that deserve to be considered when keeping historical recordings in ongoing use.

Although my topic could be conceived very broadly, my central focus will be single-sided early vocal recordings. In order to arrive at that focus, allow me to whittle down the inquiry via examples that feature recordings in other formats. Example 1: Who remembers the visual appearance of the LPs that contained the first release of Karl Böhm's Bayreuth recording of Wagner's *Ring*? The area on which the disc was pressed featured extremely varied and busily mottled spacing of the grooves—this texture was so extreme that the sides almost seemed to have many bands rather than one continuous sequence. This feature, coupled with the famously smooth, imported Philips surfaces of 1973 (which, at least in the USA, were a dramatic improvement on the domestic Philips pressings of a few years earlier), helped to give this set—yes, even the performance—an interest and a depth that somehow is not maintained when the recording is just another CD set.

Example 2: Who remembers the Bruno Walter Society's LP release of the 1952 Bayreuth broadcast of *Tristan und Isolde*, conducted by Karajan? In that set, King Marke's monologue is increasingly disturbed by a creaking on every rotation of the tape reel housing the source material, until a crisis is reached, the reel adjusted, the tape rewound, and the performance continued with some seconds of overlap, with the whole process accomplished within earshot of the listener! A final example is Herbert Blomstedt's Decca recording of Mahler's 2nd Symphony with the San Francisco Symphony. When I first played this two-disc set on my CD changer, at the conclusion of the first movement I became increasingly impatient as the disc did not change and the second movement did not begin. On checking for some sort of malfunction, I found that the disc was still playing and the timing growing ever higher. It emerged that Decca had tacked onto the end of the track containing the first movement the five minutes of silence Mahler suggested as a means of keeping the innocence of the second movement from seeming incongruous after the tragic tone of the first.

Let's examine the implications of each example, in reverse order. What are the motivations for the silence incorporated into the Mahler recording? The musical content takes 80 minutes, and when the recording was released in 1994, that was just over the limit 'permissible' on a single CD. But it wasn't *enough* over the limit to justify asking customers to pay for two discs, so it was released on two discs for the price of one, without any coupling. With all that extra time available, someone must have had the idea that it would be interesting to program Mahler's recommended silence as part of the recording. But now that 80-minute CDs are less uncommon (and now that we have numerous versions of Mahler's 2nd on a single CD), if this recording is reissued, will the reissue contain the silence? Is the silence part of the recording, or was it was introduced only because the format available at the moment of release enabled or encouraged its inclusion?

The *Tristan* example draws attention to the performative dimension of 'playing' recordings. Greater attention to the sound of what was being reproduced might have prevented the crisis that forced the rewinding and the adjustment (and of course it was a little disdainful to release for public consumption a problematic attempt to play source material that could be played well); those listening to the recording as released would not assume that the recording is faulty but that insufficient care has been taken in reproducing the source material.

Finally, consider Böhm's *Ring*. The visual impression of the discs is so unusual and contradictory that a rich ambivalence carries over into one's perception of the actual sound. Those who have no experience of that format cannot 'hear' the recording in the same way as those who have. And this example addresses only the relationship between the visual and the aural. The point I wish to make suggests that in most cases the person listening to a recording has not perceived, and has not been able to perceive, a recording only as sound. Instead, the listener's relationship to the recording has also involved operating the playback equipment, handling and caring for the commodity that enshrines the recording, procuring the recording, deciding when the recording is to be played, for what purpose, with whom it will be experienced, and so on. These and many other related activities have affected the perceptions of the recording being 'heard,' and it must be asked whether empirical study of "pure sound" does justice to the wealth of meanings any recording inevitably possesses.

Against this background, I wish now to consider acoustical vocal recordings, recorded either on cylinders or single sides of discs (for ease of discussion, I shall generally refer only to discs, although in most cases cylinders can be assumed to be

relevant as well). From the first decade of the 20th century, some listeners have wished for a greater time span than that available on the format of the day. This concern prompted record companies to introduce gradually larger discs and cylinders, mostly (in the case of discs) to sizes ranging between 10 and 12 inches, although Pathé, Fonotipia, and Odeon were among the companies that eventually doubled the 7-inch standard of 1900. Another option involved making grooves finer and closer together (Edison Diamond Discs are a notable example). But the limits of commercial practicability were strained by 14-inch discs, and the conceptual leap of splitting a work between multiple sides was made even before disc size reached its limit (and, despite the huge advances in time-span made possible by LP and CD, we're still living with that reality in commercial audio releases of, say, Act 1 of *Parsifal* or Act 3 of *Die Meistersinger*). "Complete" opera recordings were assembled and organized in the first decade of the 20th century, recordings of large-scale symphonic works soon followed, and ever since then the "drive to completeness" (even if interrupted every four, 25 or 80 minutes) has profoundly influenced the way the recording industry has developed, both in relation to the works recorded and, more recently, in the way recordings are packaged and marketed. And this fundamental assumption that complete is better demands scrutiny on various fronts.

First, one might question whether the recording of excerpts demanded by early recording formats constitutes the unfortunate and distorting artistic practice it is usually made out to be. In our current environment, it's easy to assume that the combination of short playing time and considerable expense were the factors that forced excerpts on the public, thereby simplifying great works of art for mass consumption. The further reality that the early phonograph was more successful in reproducing voices than any other musical medium has much to do with the prevalence of opera arias in the early catalogues of serious music; this seems to us to indicate that opera was the genre most frequently damaged by recordings of the day. Critics of many types have deplored the excerpting made necessary and unduly prominent by the format then available; Adorno is an obvious example.

But has this assumption ever been adequately explored against the historical background of the time, or against the nature of human perception? This is not the place for a detailed examination of the subject, but the question deserves a little attention. To begin, it seems clear that from the early days of opera until quite recently, especially in Italy, the behaviour of audiences was alternately informal, rowdy, inattentive, and passionate by today's standards. Recent research shows that theatres in which Italian opera seria was presented in the 18th century were places where people spent a great deal of time—here was their primary venue for socializing, transacting business, and being themselves. Under these conditions, people saw dozens of performances of the same opera in quick succession, to which they would consequently pay only occasional attention. The performers needed to do something out of the ordinary in order to be noticed, and then only for a few moments at a time. (Richard Taruskin provocatively suggests that a modern analogue of Italian opera in the 18th century is the family television set that runs all evening, signifying "at-homeness" without being watched much or at all, let alone attentively.[2]) John Rosselli has gathered evidence to suggest that such attitudes and behaviour persisted in Italy until the late 19th century (that is, up to the invention of recordings),[3] and live recordings of opera made in Italy during the 20th century audibly demonstrate behaviour that stems from this earlier practice. In such circumstances, the fact that an opera performance occupies several hours' time transforms into another reality, since it is probable that audience members' attention to the performance was limited to brief moments and was only captured

by means of extraordinary effort, novelty, display, skill, charm, or shenanigans on the part of the performer.

Another feature that gives early operatic recordings their potency, and one that implies a kind of listening modern sensibilities are often inclined to overlook, is the sheer sound of a beautiful and beautifully produced human voice. We frequently hear that early recordings were primitive in fidelity, and surely they did alter the way in which voices were perceived to some extent, but the sounds they produce when played today still make it possible for listeners to experience the thrill of great voices. And from the Orpheus legend to Robert Schumann's witty arabesque in which Florestan is ashamed to admit that he was moved by 'Donizetti' after immersion in Bach and Beethoven, concluding that "Truly, it was only the tone of her voice that so went to my heart,"[4] the uncanny eloquence of beautiful singing is a constant theme in musical experience. Voluminous testimony shows that Italians in particular found the soul of the performance and the performer in the sonic, expressive dimension of voices, and thus worked to train voices that could be appreciated in this way. The perceptive, even-handed, and critical Sergei Levik, whose memoirs so insightfully characterize singers active during the era when recordings were in their infancy, quotes Stanislavski as saying that he retained an auditory memory of the singing of certain Italians, as well as a physical sensation, so that "his heart stood still and he couldn't stop smiling for joy."[5] And Levik himself, who was disillusioned by much in the performances of the bass Lev Sibiriakov, was sometimes swept away by his singing and was forced to admit that "the quality of the beautifully trained and cultivated sound brought to Sibiriakov's singing an imagination and a poetry which could be just as persuasive as the intelligent and calculated singing of an artist with an average voice."[6] The segmentation of early recordings that modern listeners deride is thus often irrelevant to what makes the recording meaningful, and in fact has the effect of concentrating listening on a feature of the recorded material for which it was customary to listen in the operatic experience of the time.

Finally, the encores that were extremely common in operatic and musical performance of the 19th century demonstrate another manifestation of a mindset in which segmentation was habitual and far from undesirable. What motivated the request for encores? In opera, claques often engineered them as a means of stroking the egos and stoking the reputations of favourite singers. But, at most times, encores could be seen as a communal desire to accomplish the equivalent of lifting the tone-arm and playing the record again to increase familiarity with a particularly attractive or intriguing passage or performance. Those requests came immediately, not at the end of a complete performance, thereby showing that the concept of completeness operated in a flexible way before recordings—or, shall I say "long-playing recordings"—made completeness an attainable and normal part of musical life. (The concept of encores continues to be built into instant replays in televised sporting events, and a similar sort of segmentation is built into the phenomenon of the sound-bite in the coverage and creation of political discourse.) It may seem to us that a larger context is being violated by the concept of stormy applause and occasional repetition within a performance, but in fact the sanctity of the larger context is the creation of a later age. On the Wagnerian front, one might smile at an Italian audience's demand for encores of various passages in performances of the *Ring* in 1883; but before dismissing this merely as a clash of national cultures, one needs to remember Nietzsche's perpetually provocative characterization of Wagner as a miniaturist, which in turn dovetails intriguingly with the way in which contrasting passages were sharply differentiated in performance by Hans von Bülow, Richard Strauss,[7] and numerous early singers. (And don't

forget that Wagner himself disrupted performances of *Parsifal* by applauding his Flower Maidens.) It thus is possible to question whether the ideas of long line and unbroken continuity, often understood to be at the heart of Wagner's musico-dramatic achievement, were always understood or realized in a way we would recognize.

In any case, the very existence of number opera, and the general practice of applause after musical sections or movements, make the segmenting inevitable in early recordings seem much more like a part of the time. And the persistence of singles (whether 45s or downloads), of music videos, of commercials every few minutes in sitcoms; all of these phenomena suggest that it is a basic human experience to concentrate for a few minutes and then move on to something else or relax before continuing the attention. I am not suggesting that longer spans of attention cannot or need not be developed, whether in music or in other areas of life. Nor am I claiming that the segments possible on early recordings are invariably of the length a composer or performer might desire. But it is perhaps anachronistic to assume that early recordings inevitably aspire to a longer duration than they possess, and possibly presumptuous of us to assume that we listen better than those who—because of the format at their disposal but also because of listening habits that differ from our own—concentrated the energy of their listening on a few minutes at a time rather than stretching it out over a longer span.

I shall return to this line of thinking later on, in a different context. But in order to make good on the first part of my title, I would like to touch again on the point made in the *Tristan* example a few minutes ago. It seems to me that the parallels between a musician performing a piece of music and a sound engineer reproducing a recording are very striking, even if they can only be carried so far. In both cases, the professed aim is to work invisibly, to allow the work or recording to shine through advantageously to those who encounter it in audible form. It should be obvious to any musician that ascribing such invisibility to a performer is a mistake, since any performance reveals at least as much about the performer as it does about the work being performed. And it will be apparent to everyone in this room that, depending on the equipment, sensibilities, assumptions, and aims of the producer or sound engineer, the final sonic result of a reissued recording is an interpretation that can shape the perception of the recording as powerfully as the performer can shape the perception of the work. I do not intend to delve into technical matters regarding equalization, filtering, and the rest, since I would have no specialist's information to offer. But it does always fill me with a sense of security to see notes from producers describing the equipment used, the techniques of noise-reduction employed, the nature of the source material, the prevailing equalization, the sizes of styli used, and so on. Full disclosure on these points can help the listener who has access to original copies to gain an idea of how the results have been achieved, and of the ways in which the various methods of reproducing recordings can yield different results.

One of the most contentious areas in reissuing early vocal recordings has to do with the pitch at which they are reproduced. Gallons of ink have been spilled on this issue, and I am sure that everyone here knows it to be a problem of some importance, because small changes can decisively alter the sound of even familiar voices (anyone doubting this assertion who knows EMI's famous Furtwängler *Tristan* should hear the recent Regis transfer of the recording, which is nearly a semi-tone high and gives the voices an unfamiliarly sleek sound). In dealing with early recordings that go at approximately 78 rpm, a difference of 4 rpm changes the pitch by a semitone, and the range of speeds in use within most companies

varied by more than 4 rpm, usually in both directions. In short, no standard speed existed during this period, different companies used different ranges of speed, different cities or organizations possessed different pitch standards, singers frequently transposed the music they sang, and all the voices on acoustical recordings are now beyond the reach of reliable living memory—consequently, determining the correct speed for a given recording often leads into a quagmire of guesswork. And for that reason it seems desirable that reissues list the speed at which the recording is transferred. Some companies have done this regularly—for example, many Rubini LPs listed speeds as determined by Richard Bebb. It is also the case that some recordings of well-known singers can follow the speed decisions listed in easily accessible published discographies. But this sort of information is relatively rare in contemporary vocal reissues, and not necessarily all for the good.

One example might suffice. I have had the opportunity to hear most of the surviving Bayreuth G&T recordings of 1904 from original pressings, and have been able to determine that the ones I know play in score pitch, A=440, at about 73.5 rpm. In the early 1990s there was an important release of eight of them, including two that had not previously been reissued, on Volume 5 of Symposium's invaluable Harold Wayne Collection. On that reissue, the two discs featuring Bayreuth's famous Mime of the day, Hans Breuer, were reproduced a semitone above score pitch. This was presumably done because most people who encounter Breuer's recordings at score pitch cannot believe that so vague and foggy a sound could possibly represent accurately the timbre of a singer who appeared regularly at Bayreuth. But if the fact that everything else from these sessions has a consistent speed when score pitch is applied had been coupled with a habit of reporting speeds publicly, the producers might have been led to a different decision, since a list showing that the two recordings played at 77 rpm were also the only two that emerged a half step above score pitch might have looked just a little suspicious. In any case, even if the decision remained unchanged, the listener could understand the reason for the discrepancy in pitch by noting the chosen speeds, and could draw independent conclusions about the accuracy of the decision.

Listing speeds seems wise especially in the case of compilations featuring numerous singers, where the provenance of recordings included is vastly different. In these cases, the recordings being reissued may have been recorded adjacent to others possessed by listeners to the reissue; if speeds are included as a point of reference, it is possible for the listener to confirm (or at least work reliably toward) deeper understanding of a singer's timbre and practices in regard to transposition.

Finally, the speed on numerous early recordings changes, sometimes drastically so, over the course of the side. When modern reissues of such recordings are made, the speed should of course be constantly adjusted to allow the pitch to remain stable. But this adjustment should be acknowledged to alert the listener that the published results cannot be achieved simply by placing the disc on a turntable and playing it at one speed from beginning to end.

In turning to more general issues of documentation, allow me to focus on a recent set that is utterly invaluable to my own area of collecting (namely acoustical Wagner recordings), and extremely well done in many respects. This is the 12-CD set *100 Jahre Bayreuth auf Schallplatte: The Early Festival Singers, 1876-1906*, issued on Gebhardt nearly two years ago. The person responsible for transfers in this set is Christian Zwarg, no doubt well known to many of you, and his method of transferring recordings strikes me as at once wonderful and frightening. Wonderful, because many of the items in the set are owned by private collectors or institutional archives who needed only to send copies dubbed on their own equipment according

to Zwarg's specifications (flat equalization, no Dolby, and as much lead-in time as possible before the first recorded signal) in order to be included in sound indistinguishable to my ears from that he obtained directly from original copies. This is a welcome development in some ways. Such a capability might make the reissue of items held in diverse collections to be a more realistic possibility, since many collectors are justifiably leery of sending recordings away from home for transfer purposes. On the other hand, given that the recordings were assembled in part via this very heterogeneous method, that pitch for such examples is determined without reference to empirically determined speed, and that nothing in the booklet lets the listener know which of the sides has been directly transferred by Zwarg himself, the recordings become little more than sound, despite the detailed discographical information provided. (Parenthetically, it is worth noting that one can generally expect to encounter catalogue numbers, matrix/take numbers, and approximate recording dates on most good vocal reissues these days—although some dates are more accurate than others.)

There are other ways in which documentation in this set is less than satisfying. Elsewhere I have detailed many flaws in the information concerning Bayreuth casting,[8] but some discographical issues are also of concern. For example: The source material for various recordings that exist in unique copies (Lilli Lehmann's Liebestod and Mapleson Cylinders) goes unacknowledged. As house accompanists/conductors for the German Gramophone Company and Odeon, respectively, Bruno Seidler-Winkler and Friedrich Kark undoubtedly accompanied a great many of the recordings issued by those companies, but identifying them unquestioningly as performing that role in all situations unless there's evidence to the contrary seems unnecessarily incautious. In several cases in this set, singers unnamed on labels are positively identified, but I had to write to Hr. Zwarg to learn that these assertions had been confirmed on the basis of spectrographic analysis. The inability to tell from the booklet that these singers are not mentioned on the label causes the performer listing to contradict the numerical prefix of catalogue numbers assigned for the Gramophone Company recordings. Finally, the set includes a previously unknown Theodor Bertram recording (made by the Gramophone Company recording as a soundtrack for a Messter film short), but I learned only in correspondence, not from the booklet, that the label of the disc identifies the singer as Rudolf Pröll, not Bertram. Is not that fact worth knowing for discographical reasons even if one accepts the booklet's identification of Bertram? As for spectrographic analysis, it can be a useful tool in determining the participants in a given recording, but it surely must be cited as the basis for any assertions that contradict (or cannot be confirmed by) other evidence.

In short, where documentation is concerned, it does not make me happy when producers pretend to be omniscient. I enjoy being treated as an intelligent equal. I hope to be given information that can help me in my collecting endeavours, and improve my understanding of discs I own. As an example of how this might work, consider the 1908 Victor recording of the *Meistersinger* Quintet with Johanna Gadski and Marcel Journet. There are two takes, and in one of them (the more common, alas), Journet enters half a bar early at one point and sticks disastrously to his guns for nearly the rest of the take. When I was trying to find an original pressing of the good take, I didn't know quite how to proceed except to try every possible pressing that came along. I eventually learned from Ward Marston personally (although not from the documentation in his Gadski edition) that the good take he published came from a white-label special pressing, and since I already had a white-label special pressing of the bad take that was listed as take 1, it made sense to look for a special pressing that listed a different take or none at all

(since the published pressings of this disc are mostly on the Patents label, which generally do not show take numbers). In this way I was able to limit the search, and succeeded in obtaining a copy much more quickly than I would have done without such information.[9] In the end, it would be desirable to emulate such models of thorough annotation and documentation as that accompanying the complete LP edition of the Mapleson Cylinders,[10] which thoroughly discusses both the scope of the project and the special qualities of each individual item. I'm aware that such presentation of documentation can be costly, and that the Mapleson Cylinder project demanded more detail than most, but the existence of such models prompts disappointment when its standards are not at least approached.

In moving to the realm of experience, the discussion inevitably becomes personal. Since my listening to LPs and CDs both predates and coexists with my listening to 78s (to use the term generically), I am aware that my experience with 78s is anachronistic and cannot be compared to the experience of those who first heard 78s only in relation to live performance. Nevertheless, it seems worth explaining and hypothesizing about my experience.

For the early part of my musical and scholarly life, I was convinced that my need for historical recordings could be limited to using transfers of them, and, indeed, much of my scholarly work requires only access to a sounding copy of a given recording. Yet, even though historical reissues have contained desirable items, many items unlikely to be reissued remain on my wish-list, and the awareness that this was always likely to be so encouraged me to become a collector of 78s 25 years ago.

Early on in my collecting of 78s, I noticed that I listen to them differently than I do to recordings in other formats. There is, of course, an initial stage with any 78 in which one cleans the record, then experiments with stylus size, speed, equalization, noise reduction, filtering, and all the rest of the variables that go into playing the recording optimally. But even after I have become acquainted with the recording and have noted how to play it in the future, listening to the recording from an original pressing is somehow different. Part of this has to do with the fact that physical activity is required both at the beginning and at the end of each side, which keeps me physically alert. In addition, playing a 78 inevitably causes wear, no matter how minimal, and the giddy, carpe diem feeling of hearing a recording that will never sound this good again has a way of sharpening the senses. Of course, 78s also have more surface noise than modern recordings do, so concentrating in order to pick out musical sounds against this background is also part of the equation. These considerations are among those that combine to encourage a sort of attention that I find it hard to duplicate when listening to the same recording on tape or on CD.

Additional dimensions to this difference between formats can perhaps be best explained by describing the listening habits of a collector friend about 25 years older than I whom I have known since early in my days of collecting of 78s. I'll call him Joe. Our reasons for becoming collectors were entirely different. I was an active musician who had been collecting LPs since my late childhood, and was interested in historical recordings even then as a part of my musical activities. Eventually, my scholarly interests "forced" me to become a collector of the items I wished to study, and my collection grew via an international network of friends, contacts, and dealers, with documentation and listening experiences obtained at leading archives thrown into the mix. Joe, by contrast, is neither a musician nor a scholar. He grew up in an Italian-American home where the Victrola was a treasured possession, along with recordings to play on it. His father and elders in

his extended family had favourite recorded opera singers and introduced them to Joe as he grew, and the magic of those recordings influenced Joe to seek out those who could provide him with more recordings and more information on them. Over the years he gathered much knowledge about the types of recordings he collected, as well as about the personalities in the hobby of record collecting from the 1930s onward. He, however, did not collect through dealers but rather by regularly combing through antique shops. And with persistence, alertness, willingness to trade with other collectors, and some luck, Joe twice built remarkable collections in which fine condition was a consistent feature and without ever paying more than $5 for a record, even though numerous items in those collections might realize three and even four figures through a dealer.

Our different purposes for and methods of collecting have led to vastly different ways of listening to recordings. No-one enjoys listening to recordings more than I do, but my way is to listen critically, with my whole range of experience as a scholar, musician, and listener fully engaged, trying to discover explanations for the effects that are made via the work, the recording, the performance, or their interaction. I often listen to a recording (or passages of it) several times in sequence. I tend to go on listening binges, with practically continuous music for hours at a time. I frequently compare different recordings of the same piece or passage side by side. And although I often am swept away by what I hear, or by figuring out what I'm hearing, my listening can also abstract the expressive nature of the performance, and become technical in nature.

All this is quite foreign to the way Joe listens. I say this after having listened with him dozens of times over the years. Here is how a typical evening goes. I arrive. He graciously invites me in, and is ever the attentive host and a good conversationalist. Although he is a man of varied interests, discussion always comes back to records. We discuss singers' lives and careers, discographical questions, changes in style and appreciation, and people we have both known, and I ask him questions about people in the collecting world about whom I'd like to hear more. After a long discussion, he asks what I would like to hear. I mention a few items. He goes to retrieve the albums containing these discs. Upon his return, he launches into a string of detailed reminiscences about the day he found this particular recording, which in turn leads to other memories about what certain friends have thought of this singer or this recording. I ask his opinion of the singer in question, and he characterizes his reaction in non-technical but very thoughtful and considered terms. During this discussion he takes the record out of its album, examines it closely, wipes it carefully but vigorously with a special cloth, places the record on the turntable, places a new needle in the tone arm of the Victor Orthophonic, and, after having built up to the occasion with great care, he plays the record, to which we listen with the greatest attention. As he again wipes down the record just played, puts it away, and changes needles in preparation for the next record, we discuss the performance in great detail, comparing it to other recordings by the singer and other performances of the aria, arguing about speeds, discussing the quality of the voice and artistry, feeling free to disagree within an atmosphere of great respect. After a post-mortem that lasts at least as long as the recorded performance itself, and often far longer, conversation gradually shifts to another of the items I've mentioned, and the process begins again. In short, an evening with Joe yields a playing of three to six sides in the space of three or four hours.

If you're fidgeting with impatience at this tedious account, you must be feeling something like what I felt the first few times I listened with Joe. At first, it seemed to me a horribly inefficient experience. I was there to listen to as many records as time permitted, but Joe saw it differently, and finally convinced me by example of

the validity of listening as a distinctive and cherished but relatively small element in the larger context of one's friendships, hobbies, memories, activities, and life. (The difficulty of isolating the experience of listening in Joe's life is as hard as extracting music-making from culture often is for ethnomusicologists.) More specifically, Joe's listening is part of a social interaction, but a social interaction that comes between records rather than during them. In a sense, Joe's model of extensive conversation functions to clear the air and build expectation until one is in a state that permits intent listening; conversation ensures engagement, and one wears out by the end of the evening not through having been sated by recordings, but by expending the energy needed to engage.

Part of the specificity of the discussion and the experience is linked to the actual copy being played, and this leads to a feeling of some vulnerability. I eventually felt that when Joe plays a recording, he is literally performing it; his ritual of conversation and preparation demonstrates a way of building the concentration needed to perform. And just as encores are now out of fashion, so Joe would find it very hard to replay the recording immediately—it would ruin the effect of the performance that has just taken place. I find that my own sense of listening more keenly to a recording in original form is not unrelated to my experience as a performer—if speed or equalization need adjusting, I try to take care of it as I would a problem of balance or ensemble in making music. And I have one record which requires my active participation in order to play properly—it's a beautiful copy of Ellen Gulbranson's "Dich, teure Halle" with a very small pressing flaw on one particular high note, causing it to repeat endlessly if the tone arm is not given a little pressure encouraging it toward the centre of the disc, and I've learned how to provide the appropriate touch at just the right moment. Playing records as an act of performance? Not, perhaps, as far-fetched an idea as some might think.

Finally, one thing I've learned from the experience of listening—whether on my own or with others—has what I regard as profound implications for the study of recordings. This is the unexpected fact that recordings change. To paraphrase an old saying about a river, "no-one ever listens to the same recording twice." To be even more precise, the experience of listening carefully to a recording changes one's expectations of it. Thereafter, further experience with recordings of that performer, or with recordings or performances of that piece; further study of the piece, whether as listener, scholar, or performer; and finally, the sense of perspective brought about by time—all these factors inevitably change the content of the recording for any given listener. We often hear of performers wishing to re-record a work because they now think of it differently; similarly, attentive listeners can hardly fail to notice different things at different times in their experience of a specific recording, and often to change their minds about its value or the perspective from which it can be best understood. And even if one is not undergoing a sea-change in one's interpretation of a recording, there can be times when it does not speak as it generally has. Sviatoslav Richter offered an especially humane explanation for this phenomenon by saying that he mustn't listen to a favourite recording of his own playing too often "as that would have an unfortunate effect on the record, which, like the rest of us, is subject to its little moods."[11] Those "little moods" are an essential part of listening to recordings, and I have come to think that ways of studying them which do not leave room for "little moods" can't quite be trusted, or do not reveal what those undertaking such study think they reveal. Quantifying the "information" a recording "contains" either demonstrates the limitations of the equipment doing the quantifying, or else provides the result without understanding the motivation. Concerning this latter claim: after 9/11, amidst the finger-pointing that ensued because the US

intelligence community had failed to prevent the attacks, several talking heads observed that intelligence had become one-dimensional by concentrating on the movements of personnel and supplies without making a sufficient attempt to know what the people under surveillance were thinking. Similarly, I suggest that it is in intense personal and direct interaction with recordings that their secrets will be teased out. Recordings can be charted, after a fashion, but then one has to learn to read the charts, and in any case music-making is not an exercise in cartography. One might be better off learning how one listens than assuming that the essence of a recording can be quantified. Can the essence of a musical composition be definitively determined? If so, to what extent can that essence be determined by its score? Paradoxically, the changing perceptions of a recording make it nearly as rich and multivalent with potential meanings as a musical composition.

I conclude with a few suggestions outlining what historical reissues can do to preserve something of the experience of listening to the original recordings. First, to summarize: transparent and comprehensive documentation should be a constant goal. Although some customers will be glad to rely on the reissuer's expertise in matters technical, discographical, and scholarly, for many others the reissue will join a collection that contains previous reissues and original pressings like those used for making the reissue. Documentation should ideally help the collector to interpret his/her own original discs and explain decisions made in transferring the recording. Seeing and treating the consumer as a fellow enthusiast who is justifiably curious about the nitty-gritty of playing the recordings, or interested by anomalies that surround them, will surely result in a better product.

Second, I return to the issue of segmentation. The encyclopedist and the collector in all of us heartily applaud the drive to completeness in re-issuing recordings. Many have commented on the comfort of knowing that all the recordings of a certain performer (or of a certain performer from a certain period, or for a certain label) are on the shelf in a Romophone or Pearl or Symposium or Preiser or Marston release. And of course hearing any given recording in the context of a singer's other recordings is the way to understand some of its details most thoroughly. On the other hand, some have objected to such releases (especially those in which there are a number of versions of the same titles) as being for reference, not for listening. To take this one step further, more than seven years ago I found myself writing the following in the *BBC Music Magazine* while reviewing Marston's Complete Patti and Maurel and Complete Raisa:

> Although it's undeniably convenient to have all the recordings of a performer in one place, there's something hollow about hearing them in bulk. While revelling in Patti's richly stylish elucidation of Tosti's "La seranata" and Raisa's high-spirited and vocally resourceful "Kalinka," I wondered how we modern listeners can regain the patience to hear individual titles in such large collections with the detailed attention and hopeful eagerness one was required to extend toward them when they were distributed, heard and assimilated singly. Hearing them end to end acquaints one with the stylistic fingerprints and overall expressive profile of the performer in question, and I can confirm that one needs to live with the full range of Raisa's recordings for some time before being able to hear the tone and temperament behind the sometimes uninspiring sound of her voice as recorded. But I would suggest that those who made the original recordings were attempting to turn out jewels, not pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. … Experiencing the keenest pleasure these recordings can provide demands that we come to the titles one by one—a discipline difficult to cultivate when the whole story can seemingly be heard in a sitting or two.[12]

What are some ways of preserving the experience of single discs on modern reissues? The quick answer is that if a listener desires to hear a disc as an isolated

entity, he or she needs merely to stand up and turn off the player after each track played. Fair enough. And short of finding a default method of stopping the CD after each track, I'm not sure that there is any economically viable way of bringing into reality for CD listeners the segmented nature of listening to recordings a century ago. (Downloading or listening to individual titles via websites has more potential in this area.) Working at this problem brings us back to issues of documentation and presentation. And here there are a number of things that might be done. First, the part of the notes in Symposium's Harold Wayne Collection that I read most avidly was Dr. Wayne's account of the provenance of the very rare recordings he collected. These notes convey vicariously something of the thrill that a "find" produces, and give the recordings some individuality. In the case of more common items, such tales are probably unnecessary, but in complete editions of a singer's recordings it is helpful to read the producer's view concerning which of the items are more elusive, or to be reminded of anomalies in release dates, catalogue life, label types, or distribution patterns of the individual recordings. Such releases as the recent Collectors' Treasures CDs or Yale University's self-produced two-CD set—the one gussied up with reverberation—may initially seem fussy in the detail they offer (for example, "27 cm. Green and Red on White Label Fonotipia"), since many of the purchasers of such a set would know the information already, but every now and then learning the colour of the label, the size of the record, or the nature of the issue can be useful for scholarly or collecting purposes. Knowing something about the source material—whether an original, or a later pressing from an era that had especially good shellac, or a vinyl pressing from an original master—helps the listener to know how the results on display were achieved. (Of course, there's an inherent conflict here, because one likes to pretend that one is listening to the original, when sometimes later pressings produce better sound—but what producer likes to list the pressing or release number of the actual source material when a complete edition is being compiled?) Mentioning any distinctive features of the actual disc can give each title some particularity—for example, the nature of the rims or run-out grooves, the way in which sides containing more than one title are partitioned, the nature of the coupling or back of the disc, and so on. In the end, commentary that deals specifically and in an informed way with the recordings as individual performances or entities is perhaps the best way of keeping them from being lumped together. That practice can take more booklet space than it is customary to provide, but modelling the enthusiasm and detail that intense listening can produce is essential if historical recordings are to be kept truly alive.

And finally, there is a place for releases that are organized according to themes or programmes not focussed on the work of a specific performer. This may seem highly undesirable from a commercial perspective, and anathema to anyone not accustomed to purchasing CDs or even CD sets for a track or two of new material. But such releases, in my view, have considerable value in that they exemplify and embody the fragmented nature both of early recordings, and of collecting and acquiring them in their original form. At this point I turn the discussion over to you. Whatever the validity or practicability of my specific suggestions, I conclude with the plea that reissuers imaginatively take on the challenge of encouraging (rather than assuming) the specific, informed, and engaged listening that has brought us all such significant, life-enhancing enjoyment.

Postscript

In the period of discussion that followed the reading of this paper, John Rink (who was chairing the session) asked whether I was in fact privileging the experience of listening to recordings in their original format and claiming for that experience an illusory authenticity. I think that on the basis of a technicality I can be acquitted of

this charge, since I am speaking only of my own experience and since, in the paper itself, I clearly state my realization that my experience with 78s is in fact anachronistic. Yet I do understand the basis of John Rink's question, and it has prompted me to develop both an answer and a formulation that are more satisfying (to me, and I hope to him as well) than either the answer I provided at the moment or the formulations offered in the paper, and I thank him for helping me arrive at a more refined perspective.

In my experience of listening to music, whether live or recorded, I generally feel myself positioned somewhere between two poles, or else gravitating strongly toward one or the other of them. The first might be called a "direct" or "immediate" experience. In such circumstances, from the beginning of the work/recording to the end, one is living in the moment, concentrating carefully, suspending disbelief, empathizing with performer or work, willing maximal expressivity, and thrilling to the music. These are the kinds of occasions one lives for as a listener. The other sort of experience is one that recordings especially encourage, and it is what I would call "reflective" or (in some cases) "evaluative" experience. It can be exemplified by considering one's experience when listening for the first time a recording one has bought but never previously heard. In such a situation, one does not feel pressure to get out of the recording everything one can in one playing—one knows that the first playing will be followed by others, that one will eventually build a relationship with the recording that permits the gradual emergence of understanding. When the certainty of a prolonged relationship is assured, one need not listen "directly" at all times, and can come to understand a recording by means of layers of experience rather than through epiphany or memory of a single moment.

In positioning my argument against this conceptual background, I would say that although it is possible for me to hear both live and recorded music either "directly" or "reflectively," it is more difficult for me to hear a recording played directly from a 78 in a reflective way. If I want to build a reflective relationship with a 78, I tend to dub it and play it back in the re-recorded form (which doesn't cut down on surface noise but eliminates the residual concern about wear and vastly alters the sort of physical activity needed to play the recording). I hope that this repositioning makes clear that I am not privileging the experience of listening to an "original" 78 but that, instead, I find that that format restricts to at least some extent the kind of experience I can have with the recording.

Some of the things said—and left unsaid—in the other presentations that made up this symposium have caused me to wish to offer a few further thoughts.

Cast your mind back to the very interesting session on Thursday evening when the four transfer engineers presented their transfers of the *Dame blanche* aria sung by David Devriès. When I asked numerous people afterwards which of the transfers they preferred, a surprising number—actually 75% of my sample, including two of the transfer engineers themselves—reported that their favourite was the first version heard that evening as a point of reference for the transfers that were to follow. There are no doubt a number of reasons for this—it was the first time that day that we had heard it (although many of us know it well); we were listening keenly because it was to serve as a point of reference for our later evaluations; and we were listening together with people who were also listening carefully. In this context, it is perhaps incidental that the source of the sound in that "favourite" hearing was an actual 78—or is that too part of the reason that contributed to the effect that the recording made? If the format contributed to the experience in any

way, some of the point of my paper was confirmed by our experience in that session.

But it must be pointed out that even in this playing the recording was not unmediated. Not only was Ted Kendall keeping the pitch steady by gradual adjustment of the speed, but he had found a solution that prevented us from hearing the swish that all the engineers agreed was endemic to their initial playing of the recording. And in the course of the weekend, even the recording that was least mediated—perhaps the first link in the chain of sonic restoration Mark Obert-Thorn offered in relation to the beginning of the Chopin Etude played by Cortot—was still presented at a certain speed, was recorded on Mark's equipment, and was played back on speakers that in Mark's view emphasized the bass more than his do. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that there is no such thing as an unmediated recording—and therefore that every playing of any recording is an interpretation of it, if only unintentionally and unavoidably so. And even if we could get back to an actual experience of the performance that was recorded, Martin Elste's insightful questioning of the myth of authenticity surrounding the performances heard on 78s leads to the realization that the performances are at some distance from the kinds of performances that performers would have given in customary surroundings.[13]

So, given these considerations, I'm drawn back to the statement by Alfred Mann quoted in the first paragraph of my paper: "The only reliable guide into the future will always be the primary source." If this is so, where does the "primary source-ness" in a historical recording reside? It is tempting to locate it with the performers, since the activities of most record collectors and the CHARM-related study of recordings is prompted by interest in the "performances" enshrined on them. But if that information is untrustworthy (in light of Elste's myth of authenticity, Michael Gray's reminder that the goal of recordings was to make money, and the fact that there was not always a direct correlation between a performer's renown and his/her suitability for recording purposes), it seems—*pace* the transfer engineers who regard their role as removing every possible barrier between the listener and the performance—that it also (and perhaps instead, in many cases) resides in the recording "itself" (that is, somewhere in the relationship between original master and the discs pressed from it). On that front, the report by John McBride, whose project offers the potential for preserving "virtual" source material, seemed to be a very promising step forward in preservation and in the attempt to make physical artefacts an essential point of reference for all who wish to work with a recording.

One further, partially contradictory consideration brings this postscript to its conclusion. I hoped, in the ending of my opening paragraph, to "touch on some concepts that deserve to be considered when keeping historical recordings in ongoing use." The idea of how to re-record historical recordings "properly" or "accurately" clearly addresses this issue to some extent. But it seems to me that many of the issues raised in this symposium concerning how recordings were made and what that process implies for their reproduction in a modern context are the equivalent of the New Testament scholar trying to determine exactly what Jesus said—and with just as little effect on the way in which those recordings will be perceived or used as the results of the NT scholar's inquiry does on the beliefs and activities of the "Bible-believing" Christian. Surely the specialists at this conference are quite right in wishing to insist on certain standards or qualities in transfers, and to continue research into how the recordings were made in order to produce optimally accurate reproductions of the recording (at least insofar as "optimally accurate reproductions" are understood at the time the transfer is made). But consider a sculpture or a painting—say George Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande*

Jatte. To what extent is its meaning and artistic stature dependent on its being seen in person? Those who do see it at the Art Institute of Chicago come away amazed at how much richer the experience is compared to studying the painting via a reproduction, no matter how good that reproduction may be. But the people who can appreciate the experience of the "original" most fully are those who have already familiarized themselves with [aspects of] the painting in other contexts. By analogy, good transfers, although ultimately crucial for specialists, are perhaps less important than we think for non-specialists. Fundamental features of the essence of early recordings apparently speak through even poor transfers just as essential parts of Seurat's painting can be understood with only imperfect and indirect awareness of its size, its colour, and the difference made by one's proximity to the painting. This point is important to stress precisely because all recordings are experienced in mediated form, so that one age's (or person's) state-of-the-art transfer may well fail to meet the needs of another. Consequently, the study of recorded music must learn to live productively with inevitable tension between the desire for transfers of ultimate technical sophistication and "accuracy" and the fact that a recognizable (even if possibly distorted) image of any recording emerges from and lives on through even poor transfers.

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[1] Alfred Mann, "Music History from Primary Sources: An Introductory Essay," in Jon Newsom and Alfred Mann, eds., *Music from Primary Sources: A Guide to the Moldenhauer Archives* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2000), 77.

[2] Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Music*, 6 vols. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), II, 172-76.

[3] John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 39-41.

[4] Quoted in Henry Pleasants, *The Great Singers* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 354.

[5] Sergei Levik, *The Levik Memoirs: An Opera Singer's Notes*, trans. Edward Morgan (London: Symposium Records, 1995), 121.

[6] Levik, 137.

[7] David Breckbill, "Conducting," in Barry Millington, ed., *The Wagner Companion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 354.

[8] *ARSC Journal* 36/1 (Spring 2005), 111-19.

[9] Marston's booklet lists the good take as unpublished and as take 2, whereas the copy I obtained lists no take number.

[10] Rogers & Hammerstein R&H 100 (1985).

[11] Bruno Monsaingeon, *Sviatoslav Richter: Notebooks and Conversations*, trans. Stewart Spencer (London: Faber/Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 241.

[12] *BBC Music Magazine* (March 1999), 87.

[13] Martin Elste, "Technische Reproduktion," in *Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft, Bd. 11: Musikalische Interpretation* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1992), 409-11.