

## Why Recorded Music Matters: A Review Essay

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Libraries may sometimes appear to be overflowing with books that mean rather little to most people, and as the pressure of accountability for maximized research outputs is increasingly placed on universities, an inexcusable number of trees is sacrificed for the reams of paper bound in obscure publications that seem to offer little new knowledge of consequence. The appearance of yet another new scholarly book about music is, therefore, only rarely heralded as a significant event. Amanda Bayley's latest book even has a rather generic title: *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); However, looks can be very deceiving, and upon careful reading I do not hesitate to suggest that this may turn out to be one of the very most important music books of the decade.

The astonishing array of insightful essays compiled in *Recorded Music* collectively offer a revolutionary view of mediated musical experience, and its scholarship, and compellingly assert that across recent generations a new field, aptly called "phonomusicology," has covertly emerged, consisting of analyses of the art of musical sound recording. The editor of this volume, Amanda Bayley, is a specialist in 20<sup>th</sup> century European art music and previously served as editor of another important text *The Cambridge Companion to Bartok*. In *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology*, Dr. Bayley and her colleagues offer an expansive vision of the role that technological developments have played in shaping the production and consumption of music across the past century. Many leading contemporary music scholars have contributed to this unique book, including John Baily and Jonathan Stock (two of the most prolific and forward-thinking ethnomusicologists alive today), influential popular music scholar Allan Moore, and an array of other notable specialists in the fields of popular music, jazz, contemporary art music, and the history of sound recording, including Stephen Cottrell, Peter Johnson, Andrew Blake, Adam Krims, James Barrett, David Patmore, Peter Elsdon, Catherine Tackley, Serge Lacasse, John Dack, Virgil Moorefield, Albin Zak, and Tony Gibbs. This star cast of interdisciplinary musical thinkers - mostly hailing from the UK - covers a broad range of topics associated with the theme of sound recording as a musical and cultural phenomenon.

In recent years, British musicologists in particular have rejected the widespread disdain toward recent popular music that had characterized more traditional forms of musicology. It follows that the authors of this volume offer an inclusive vision of music in their discussion, boldly acknowledging the artistry associated with popular music genres. Passages of this book refer to the work of several important popular music performers from recent years, including Peter Gabriel, Tori Amos, Alanis Morissette and Ben Folds

Five, as well as (unsurprisingly) some revolutionary classic performances by the Beatles, Beach Boys, jazz masters Miles Davis and John Coltrane, and many others. Contemporary art music composers and ensembles are insightfully discussed as well, including conductor Simon Rattle, composer Michael Finnissy, the Kreutzer Quartet, and several notable figures from European art music who became influential partly through recordings during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Leonard Bernstein, Benjamin Britten, and Gustav Mahler.

It is unusual to have the opportunity to review such an important book, and impossible to do justice to all it contains. Although there is not a weak chapter in the book, some stand out as particularly worth detailed mention. First, a bit more about the form seems in order. Following its editorial Introduction, *Recorded Music* is divided into four parts, each of which contains either four or five chapters. The four major divisions are entitled “Recordings and their Contexts,” “The Recording Process,” “Recordings as Texts,” and “Sonic Creations and Re-Creations.”

Part 1 “Recordings and their Contexts” contains chapters by Stephen Cottrell, Peter Johnson, Andrew Blake, and Adam Krims. To begin, Stephen Cottrell reflects on various ways that the emergence of sound recordings has challenged the field of musicology to develop new paradigms and analytical techniques, and even to reconsider its ultimate objectives. He declares that “Only in the domain of Western art music recordings have issues of reception and consumption of music been too frequently overlooked” (p.29), and suggests that scholars of art music may still have much to learn from other branches of musicology in which recordings (rather than musical scores) have long been recognized as cultural artifacts. Cottrell outlines a field he calls phonomusicology, which he defines as “the study of recorded music, including its contexts of production and patterns of consumption” (pp.15-16), and identifies an abundance of potentially rewarding approaches to the study of musical recordings. Peter Johnson challenges readers to reconsider what listeners seek from sound recordings versus live performances. He notes that “recording can promote the illusion of the perfect product in ways that are always compromised in live performance” (p.48), and suggests that further attention is needed to the myriad ways that exposure to recordings affects our expectations and, ultimately, our perceptions of live performances. Andrew Blake expertly probes an array of ethical issues associated with the rise and popularized distribution (and manipulation) of digital sound files, while Adam Krims vividly demonstrates how music reception is largely shaped by its role within other media, including television and movies.

Part 2 “The Recording Process” contains chapters by James Barrett, John Baily, David Patmore, and Peter Elsdon. James Barrett writes of the evolution of sound technology and recording studio techniques, with particular attention to the role of the record producer as a form of creative artist. John Baily’s chapter concerns the evolution of conventional ways for producing “world music” recordings, with particular attention to the three cases of (1) Hugh Tracey’s collection in the International Library of African Music, (2) Baily’s

own work on the music of Afghanistan, and (3) Peter Gabriel's WOMAD and Real World projects. He acknowledges an array of perspectives and practices, and expresses concern that cultural rights be appropriately respected by any who would profit from sound recordings, particularly of traditional music from throughout the world. David Patmore offers an insightful profile of conductor Simon Rattle and his use of sound recordings as an effective strategy for enhancing both the public profile and artistic integrity of professional orchestras he has conducted. Peter Elsdon's chapter offers a rich and provocative discussion of jazz saxophonist John Coltrane's work, centering on analysis of an extreme array of interpretations evident in Coltrane's performances of his own tune "Chasin the Trane." Elsdon's work challenges readers to reconsider what a "tune" actually is in jazz, and the extent to which different performances of the same tune might be seen as different pieces of music, or alternatively, offer unique windows into the creative process of the artist. Analysis of different "takes" in the process of producing studio recordings, or even live performances, enables rigorous examination of such questions.

Part 3 "Recordings as Texts" contains chapters by Catherine Tackley, Jonathan P. J. Stock, Amanda Bayley, Serge Lacasse, and Allan Moore. The chapter by Catherine Tackley – a jazz studies specialist with expertise on the history of jazz in the UK – discusses the reception of two of the most influential jazz recordings of the twentieth century: "Livery Stable Blues" by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (1917), and Miles Davis's album *Kind of Blue* (1959). Her chapter documents the array of responses to these recordings across time, among musicians, critics, and the general public. Jonathan Stock offers four fascinating cases from his own ethnomusicological field work (mostly in China) that illustrate various uses of recordings: (1) recordings as documents of field research, (2) recordings as tools in performance research, (3) recordings as tools for historical research, and (4) playback as a tool in music research. Taken as a whole, the techniques demonstrated by Stock enable ethnomusicologists to acquire a far deeper understanding of musical cultures than would otherwise be possible. Contributing editor Amanda Bayley also offers a very insightful chapter, which consists of an ethnography of the process of studio recording. Her study focuses on the intensive musical interactions associated with the Kreutzer Quartet's studio recordings of Michael Finnissy's Second String Quartet, and demonstrates the role of creative decision-making within the sound recording process. Serge Lacasse's chapter is also beautifully written, offering a probing analysis of the use of paralinguistic expression among popular music vocalists. Part 3, which already contains enough insights to be published as a separate book, concludes with a brilliant chapter entitled "The Track" by the influential rock musicologist Allan Moore. Moore provocatively argues that the recorded "track" should replace "song" as a major category for musicological analysis, and demonstrates how such a perceptual shift would lead to a more meaningful understanding of recorded music.

Part 4 "Sonic Creations and Re-Creations" contains chapters by John Dack, Virgil Moorefield, Albin Zak III, and Tony Gibbs. John Dack's chapter discusses the

development of acousmatic music, an influential style of contemporary art music composition based on sound collage that may be traced to the innovative work of French composer Pierre Schaeffer. Next, Virgil Moorefield writes about the phenomena of covers, remixes, and mash-ups in popular music, offering interesting examples that clarify the development and delineations of these approaches to music recording. Albin Zak's chapter discusses the creative artistry of studio engineers who produce distinctive sounds through the use of particular recording studio effects that contribute significantly to the definition of a musical style. Tony Gibbs concludes the book with a visionary essay on possible musical futures that have been opened by the democratization of access to sound recording technology and interactive new media.

This book would be ideally suited as a required textbook for the humanistic component of any music technology program, as well as for university courses designed for the training of researchers who will work in sound archives or recording studios, or who intend to conduct studies that take analysis of recorded performances as a main point of departure. The latter would certainly include the majority of recent research in jazz studies as well as innovative forms of music theory scholarship, and also certain kinds of work in the fields of popular music studies and ethnomusicology. *Recorded Music* will also be an essential resource for any sound archive that aspires to be utilized more broadly as a research collection.

Although professional reviewers of academic publications are usually expected to offer at least a few criticisms, it is difficult to conceive of any significant shortcomings in the case of this book. Perhaps inclusion of a specialist in music education or music therapy among the contributors would have offered some additional perspectives on the role of musical recordings in other important domains of music participation and consumption, and it would also be interesting to see what scholars from outside Europe and the Americas would write about the role of recorded music in their own societies, but these seem to be projects for another book. To conclude, *Recorded Music* is very well conceived and makes a unique contribution to the field. Moreover, it is expertly written and impeccably edited, and arguably belongs in every music library.

Amanda Bayley, (Ed.), *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.