Review of *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*

The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music, edited by Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 359pp., including notes, bibliography, discography and index. http://www.cambridge.org/it/knowledge/isbn/item2427460

This book, edited by the four founders and directors of the British-based AHRC – Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (www.charm.rhul.ac.uk), features the first serious attempt to provide a detailed overview of the very broad issue of music recordings.

As its editors state, the book is aimed "to promote an understanding of the ways in which recording has both reflected and shaped music." As such, it relates to classical, jazz and popular Western music recordings, and encompasses an extensive range of issues, presented below.

The book is presented as a selection of several major articles addressing different aspects of this extensive field, which form the book's main chapters. These are combined with shorter essays, offering a more personal and reflective viewpoint to the specific issue engaged in each chapter. Authors include a large group of practitioners and connoisseurs – musicologists, performers of various musical genres, producers, sound engineers, sound technicians and enthusiasts.

The vast amount of topics dealt with here is impressive:
Essays included in chapter 1 address such issues as performers' attitudes toward the recording process and its technology, recordings' legitimacy and significance in regard to performance practice studies, music-recording status compared to live performances, and the divergence in attitude toward technology between classical and pop performers.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the producers' role and status, commemorating historical figures of the industry, examining the nature of mainstream recorded repertoire and historic commercial endeavors or drawing a concise sketch of the history of pop recorded productions. Its articles touch upon fundamental questions such as recordings' role in shaping performers' individual style or the recording industry's influence on new music consumption.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the function of the sound engineer, focusing on the historical development of sound engineering, addressing aesthetic trends and studio technologies as well as discussing the sound engineer's status in the overall music-making process.

Following, chapter 4 examines the mutual interaction between the various performance agents and the hierarchic relations in the studio.

Chapter 5 investigates the influence of recordings on music listening habits. Through observing the very act of music listening in history, its authors focus on the impact of recording technologies on music consumption, on music perception, and on its role in molding individual and group identities.

Chapter 6 reviews the history of recording technologies and industry from the very beginning (Edison's invention of 1878) to their present digital nature, touching on such subjects as commercial development, major labels and preferable music genres manifested throughout the years. In addition, thoughts about the industry's future are presented.

Chapter 7 expands on the history of recording technologies and provides a broader understanding as to basic principles of the recorded process and its developments. In its major article, technical aspects of recording are presented most clearly.

Chapter 8 takes on a series of topics related to the study of recordings as documents of musical artifacts. It includes practical guidance for tracing records, original copies and surrounding documentation (such as the information displayed on the disc label); a discussion on the restrictions and limitations of technology (including a focus on remastering from 78 rpm to originals, presented in one of the shorter essays); and case studies where recordings of different genres are examined—all serving to illustrate the invalidity of perceiving records as a mere representation of any one performance, rather than what they actually are: autonomous artifacts intended for interpretation.

Chapter 9 serves as a logical continuation of the former section, as it presents various methods of analyzing recordings. It includes an overview of their development using former recording-analysis studies as input. Its final section touches on fundamental controversies connected with the issue discussed, primarily the relevance and legitimacy of using empirical, computationally-based analytical methods for comprehension of musical performance.

Chapter 10 addresses the compound subject of performance style and the role of recordings in both unfolding and shaping performance norms of practice. Its main article engages in the history of changing performance styles (including an essay on the historically informed movement's outstanding significance in this regard), providing an interpretation of the process by which style changes, and resolving the issue by pointing to a future scenario in which performance style will be shaped as a result of economic competition with machine-made music performances.

Chapter 11 focuses on record reviewing and on the record critic. It includes an outline of historical press reviews and their overall outlook in regard to music coverage, a classification of the different facets of record criticism and of its role and value in the music arena, emphasizing the differentiation between critical writing on different musical genres.

The concluding article, entitled "Afterword," reflects the book's main narrative, namely, the centrality of sound reproduction in the modern era, its meaning and effect. Adorno's discernment of "mechanical reproduction" as inciting music's

degeneration, and Benjamin's opposite view, regarding mass production as a liberating effect, serve as a point of departure for this closing paper. References are made to approaches described in previous chapters, such as the revolutionary shift from the physical object of recording (LP, CD, etc.) to the digital environment of sound, the notion of recording as an autonomous representation rather than a mere reproduction of the original performance (enforced in a view of music created as part of the recording studio practices, such as electronic art or popular music), the relationship between recording paradigms and socioeconomic settings, or hierarchical relations combined with collaborative creative practice in and out the studio.

The book's final section presents the idea that the current digital age, marked by sequencing and sampling as its main features, has shifted musical experience from one of representation to "remediation," i.e. a kind of fluid or "unfixed" music that is constantly re-created and globally hyper-circulated.

In its coherent chapter division and concise manner of presentation the book is quite user-friendly. Its main articles are clearly and intelligibly presented, and some of the shorter, more intimate essays (fittingly entitled "personal takes") are illuminating. Such, for example, is Roger Beardsley's stirring account of the rediscovery of a recording by Tamagno made some 100 years ago,[1] or Nigel Simeone's "behind the screen" documented description of the original recording sessions of Bernstein's *West Side Story*.[2]

Being a conglomerate of theoretical essays, individual discourses and autobiographical testimonies, there is no attempt to display uniform standpoints or authoritative views regarding one issue or another. In fact, as was appropriately announced in the introduction, some of the articles are even contradictory. Such editorial policy exhibits the complex arena of themes: an amalgamation of short sketches, some of which take on autobiographical lineaments, certainly contributes to the overall plethora of ideas.

The discussion of the loaded subject—of live versus recorded performance—could serve as an example. On the one hand, pianist Susan Tomes asserts that multi-take recorded performances are far inferior to live concerts, the latter featuring "the sense of sharing the excitement of communication with other listeners," which is lacking in the recording studio's cold and strict atmosphere.[3] Such perception is additionally manifested in pianist Peter Hill's report of a recording session in which the very first, un-edited take was preferred due to its "careless rapture," thus making it a "real performance."[4] Yet, while addressing the immense difference in both physical and psychological arenas between the stage and the recording studio, singer Donald Greig seems less judgmental in preferring one idiom to the other. For him, the absence in the studio of social interaction between performer and audience, and the lack of a whole set of expressive devices manifested through the visual domain, simply demands enhanced manners of execution of the various musical parameters—

[1] R. Beardsley, "Raiders of the Lost Archive," pp. 177-80.
[2] N. Simeone, "The Original Cast Recording of West Side Story," pp.181-85.
[3] S. Tomes, "Learning to Live with Recording," p. 11.
[4] P. Hill, "A Short Take in Praise of Long Takes," pp. 14-15.

such as more contrast in dynamics or tempo.[5] Representing the clearly opposite pole, producer Michael Haas absorbs multi-take recording as one that "broadens musical horizons" in its ability to emphasize the tiniest of interpretative nuances and to fix technical mishaps in a manner that could "allow risks never taken in concert."[6]

Yet, while interesting and even fascinating at times, this extensive book has its weaknesses. One is the relatively remote linkage found in several instances between the main article and its essays, thus blurring the chapter's intended theme or idea. Such drawbacks are found, for example, in Tully Potters' autobiographical account of his early exposure to recordings, for which, other than its geographical setting (South Africa), no relevance could be traced to the fourth chapter's main topic.[7] Similarly, Nick Mason's account of the improvised sound effects used in some of the Pink Floyd albums of the early 1970s—an interesting and at times amusing anecdote in itself—lacks direct, explicit reference to chapter 8's narrative.[8] Another example is Chris Watson's wonderful and poetic account of his experiences recording the sounds of wildlife and nature, for which the association to chapter 11's main article is yet to be explained.[9]

Another unavoidable impediment is the provisional nature of some of the technology-oriented articles, which will most probably seem outdated in the course of time. Modern coding schemes such as MPEG Layer III (MP3), discussed in Brock-Nannestad's coherent presentation, or analytical equipment such as the Sonic Visualiser introduced in Cook's thorough paper, will no doubt appear obsolete in the near future.[10] This, of course, seems less obvious for articles focusing on subjects of the more ideological type.

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[5] D. Greig, "Performing for (and against) the Microphone," pp. 16-20.
[6] M. Haas, "Broadening Horizons," pp. 61-62.
[7] T. Potter, "From Lanza to Lassus," pp. 98-101.
[8] N. Mason, "Technology, the Studio, Music," pp. 214-16.
[9] C. Watson, "Something in the Air," pp. 283-85.
[10] G. Brock-Nannestad, "The Development of Recording Technologies," p. 174; N. Cook, "Methods for Analyzing Recordings," p. 223.