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## *Optimising the Recording Process*

*Exploring the ideal mindset and approach to recording  
practise*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss which approach and mindset is most optimal when creating a recording as a classical musician. This thesis examines and compares the differences between the practise of creating a recording and live performance predominantly from the perspective of the performer. Firstly, a review of literature from the field is made followed by a reflection of my own personal experiences with recording. Then a survey is created based on themes I have observed from the previous sections of the thesis and given out to music students and teachers from Malmö Academy of Music. The results are later compared and contrasted with my personal experiences and the literary sources in a discussion. The discussion is divided into five areas of concern; risk taking and perfectionism, audience versus camera or microphone, self-awareness, pressure and focus and preparation.

Keywords: Recording, live performance, live stream, audience, camera, microphone

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## 1.Introduction

Music like any other performance art is dependent on having an audience. Today that audience can either be present at the time and place of the performance (live performance) or through the medium of a recording. From the advent of the first Edison phonophone or ‘talking machine’ of the early 20th century to the high-quality mixing and editing of today, recording technology has made it possible for musical performances to be accessible to a wide audience who may listen to them at any time and in any place they wish.

For most, listening to recordings is the most frequent way we experience music, as “recording technology has made performances of music more readily available than ever before” (Davies, 1988, p.5). With the emergence of streaming services such as YouTube and Spotify, music has become easily available to listen to during our everyday life without the need of the performers in our immediate presence.

Whether we can classify recordings as true performance is something that has been widely discussed. In *Musical Performance: A Philosophical Study*, Stan Godlovitch asserts that “recordings of performances, however, are not performances. Recordings are just traces or records of performances, and no more performances in their own right than photos are the objects photographed” (Godlovitch, 1998, p. 14). He argues that one of the key differences between live performance and recording is that performance is rooted in an organised one-time event, in contrast to the tangibility and repeatability of a recording. When a live performance occurs and it is not recorded, it is ephemeral and impossible to replicate exactly. In contrast, recordings are able to document sound and preserve them on physical media (Katz, 2004, p. 5). They then become “tangible, portable, repeatable and manipulable” (Katz, 2004, p. 189).

Another point Godlovitch makes is that a performance is “intended for,... presented for... and listened to by a third party listener exercising active concentrated attention” (Godlovitch, 1998, p. 50). Similarly, Theodore Gracyk defines performance as a “public situation in which an audience attends to the actions of one or more performers during which specified sounds are intentionally generated for the express purpose of being attended to as music by the audience” (Gracyk, 1997, p. 139). When a recording is created there is usually a lack of a predetermined audience, or the wider scope of audience is unknown as the recording is later available to all kinds of listeners. This undermines the criteria that Godlovitch and Gracyk put forward for performance which relies on a selected, present audience.

As musical recordings are becoming more accessible, a musician will undoubtedly face the process of recording their playing during their career. Whilst a great deal of practise and preparation is undertaken with the primary goal of live performance, the recording process is also necessary to work on to be equipped to handle situations such as creating CD’s, collaborating with other artists on recording projects, creating audition tapes, and sharing online. The differences between live and recorded performances can be examined from both a performer’s and an audience member’s perspective, however in this thesis I will be solely focusing on the performer’s experience of the recording process and what mindset to have while creating recordings.

## 1.1 Background

As stated previously, a musician’s career will inevitably encounter the process of recording especially in the modern world with YouTube, streaming services and ever-growing technological possibilities. Recording technology has become particularly important to keeping the performing arts alive during the covid19 pandemic. Many orchestras, concert halls and other concert venues have used live streaming and recorded performance made available to audience members on a digital platform in lieu of a live audience in order to adhere to social distancing rules.

During my music performance studies I have experienced the process of recording as a part of a quartet in projects for jazz, pop and composition students as well as creating recordings

for auditions for courses and university entrance exams. Due to the extraordinary circumstances caused by the covid19 pandemic this past year I have encountered the recording process even more frequently. I have participated in a live streaming of both an orchestral project and a string quartet at a function outside of my studies as well as sending recordings to my teacher in place of weekly instrumental lessons. These occasions have all differed from how I would experience live performance without recording and presented unique challenges. I have encountered both positive and negative attributes of the process of recording as opposed to live performance.

## 1.2 Aim and method

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and discuss what unique issues a recording process involves and the mindsets and strategies we can use to create a recorded performance. The recording process is something which is a standard occurrence within a musicians' career. While it is a form of performance, the circumstances and outcomes of producing a recording are different from a live concert or performance moment.

In order to explore how to deal with the process of making a recording I will review literary sources, reflect on my own experiences with recordings and then create a survey asking different musicians about the possible issues or difficulties that are faced during a recording process and how they may overcome these challenges. Finally, I will compare and contrast the results of the survey with my own experiences and the sources which I have summarised in the discussion section of this thesis. I will begin by examining literature in the field to give a broader context and deeper understanding of the recording process from the performers' perspective.

## 2. Sources

In the chapter 'Classical Sound Recordings and Live Performances: Artistic and Analytical Perspectives' (2008), Fabian explores how western classical music recordings are viewed in comparison to live performance. She examines the ideas of philosophers Godlovitch, Davies and Krausz surrounding the definition of performance and the differences in experience of listening to a recording and a live performance. Fabian then includes various accounts of the recording process from the perspective of musical artists, such as Susan Tomes, Yehudi Menuhin and Charles Rosen. She forms the point of view that a recording can be an accurate representation of an artist's interpretation of a piece at that moment in time, and that she would therefore deem them performances.

In order to gather more information from the musicians' point of view she conducts a survey of 39 different recording artists from around the world and asks questions such as "Do you think recordings are different from (live) performances?", "In terms of intentions, do you play differently in the recording studio than in a concert?" and "Are you taking more risks in the studio than in live concerts?" (Fabian, 2008, p.8). From this survey Fabian deduces six main issues whilst recording: risk taking, nervousness (a lack of), repeatability (the permanence of a recording), technical precision, spontaneity and excitement, and audience impact. (Fabian, 2008, p. 10).

Negotiating Liveness: Technology, Economics and the Artwork in LSO Live (2014) is an article about the creation of the LSO Live recording label in 2000 and how the recording practises affect and inform the orchestra's performances. The LSO Live label was created to make orchestral recordings consisting primarily of live performances which was a budget-friendly solution compared to the usual studio session recording process. The orchestra would

play the same concert twice which were both recorded as well as the rehearsal sessions and even an additional session after the final concert if needed to 'patch' problem areas.

Interviews with orchestra members reveal that there is a certain level of anxiety that comes with the presence of microphones during rehearsal and performance, one musician states "the problem is not getting things wrong, the problem is that you're constantly thinking: 'when am I going to get things wrong?'" and another- "you don't want to sit thinking 'microphone', you want to sit thinking 'music'" (Aguilar, 2014, p. 263). Despite the pressure of the constant recording, the author notes that there also "seems to be a sense that the implicit risk involved in this type of recording is a driver for the making of great music." (Aguilar, 2014, p. 264). Recording in a concert situation was also viewed amongst orchestral members as a positive, as they were more focused, the performance felt more authentic and exciting and created "in a natural way, not the tedious repetition of the studio" (Aguilar, 2014, p. 265).

'Performance Values - an artistic research perspective on music performance anxiety' is an article by researchers Francisca Skoogh and Henrik Frisk (2019). It deals with what typical performance values adhere to western classical music and what effect they may have on the level of performance anxiety musicians experience. They discuss the contradiction between performing in a way that honours the composer's intentions as much as possible and performing a work with an original artistic insight and interpretation which has not been heard before. The former performance value of being true to what the composer writes (also described as the term 'Werktreue') combined with the pressure of playing without error can add to music performance anxiety and "puts creative constraints on the individual musician" (Skoogh & Frisk, 2019, p.2). This issue of playing error-free and the question of whether to be true to the composer or freely interpret the music according to one's own artistic intentions is also prevalent in the process of recording.

Perfectionism is also discussed and its connection to performance anxiety. A study by Patston & Osborne from 2016 is mentioned which shows evidence that students between 10 and 17 experience more feelings of perfectionism and music performance anxiety as they gain more experience on their instrument. Skoogh's (2019) account of her own performance experience playing Rachmaninov's third piano concerto with Norrköping Symphony Orchestra and a review by music critic Martin Nystrom are examined. Skoogh (2019) writes that the performance was signified by severe performance anxiety, yet the review the next day stated

amongst other praise ‘the triumph afterward was deafening’ (Skoogh & Frisk, 2019, p.10). This made evident that our own thoughts of the performance do not necessarily match up to what the audience experiences. The authors suggest that a way to counteract perfectionism and music performance anxiety is to focus instead on approaching “interpretation as a motion that continuously participates in creating new versions of the work” (Skoogh & Frisk, 2019, p.12) and the reappraisal of experienced failures through understanding the listeners experience as well as our own.

The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music (Cook, N., Clarke, E., Leech-Wilkinson, D. & Rink, J., 2009) provides many views of recording in chapters written by performers and producers alike. The following sources are all from authors who contributed to the book.

‘Performing for and against the microphone’ by Donald Grieg (2009) discusses the differences between concerts and recordings for both pop and classical singers and musicians. Grieg (2009) outlines the major difference that there is a degree of loss of control in a concert, that if a faster than expected tempo is taken or dynamics are louder or softer than expected there is no stopping and starting to correct this. In the studio it is possible to do so and edit or ‘patch’ later.

He also discusses other disparities such as the absence of a real audience to communicate with through “facial expression, gesture, phatic language and rhythmic indicators” (Grieg, 2009, p.19), the possibility of playback or immediate feedback from producers which create a self-critical environment, and the attention to detail created by the recording’s permanence which in turn creates a certain pressure on performance. According to the performers “particular psychic disposition” they may prefer either the concert hall; a place where human error is more accepted and overlooked or the recording studio where they can safely control what amounts to the final product of the ‘performance’ (Grieg, 2009, p.19).

In ‘Broadening horizons: ‘Performance’ in the Studio’ another chapter within The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music (2009), recording producer Michael Haas discusses some observations he has had about performing artists in the studio and the difference between sound recording and live performance. He firstly outlines the fundamental differences, stating that as soon as a performance is recorded “it ceases to animate and becomes only a reproduction” (Haas, 2009, p. 60). Whilst live performance is fleeting and ephemeral, when we observe a

recording we have the chance to do it repeatedly and notice smaller details and perhaps gain a more layered understanding of the interpretation. Haas (2009) also addresses the issues which recording artists face in the studio. He has found that many musicians believe the recording process acts as a microscope highlighting the flaws of their playing, but disagrees with this, stating that “the studio’s means of removing minor blemishes normally liberates the creative performer and allows risks never taken in concert” (Haas, 2009, p.61) He uses the example of Glenn Gould, who found making music in the studio more superior to playing live concerts, and Radu Lupu who conversely stopped making recordings as the studio became this “microscope, emphasising too many interpretive graduations” (Haas, 2009, p.61).

Pianist Susan Tomes discusses in her chapter ‘Learning to Live with Recording’ (2009) the experience of creating a recording in a chamber music group. She mentions how the recording session can come as a shock to musicians who are used to performing concerts as they require one to play their “chosen repertoire at a high intensity for hours on end” (Tomes, 2009, p. 10). The recording process can make musicians more self-critical and self-conscious, that each player focuses more on reliability and creating a flawless take than focusing outward and communicating within the ensemble. She describes how her chamber group tends to play movements of a work and later go back and ‘patch’ any problem areas later in order to preserve the overall shape of the interpretation. While she finds that a recording is often a “mosaic of the player’s best attempts, most noiseless takes and the least error-prone versions” (Tomes, 2009, p. 12) she also concludes that as long as nothing has been electronically created that editing and fixing a record with the best takes is still a viable way to create a recording.

Another professional pianist Peter Hill (2009) recounts an experience he has where he is recording the piano works of Havergal Brian. Neither Hill nor the recording company thought to hire a producer, but instead found “a handful of Havergal Brian enthusiasts” who quickly formed an “advisory committee” (Hill, 2009, p. 13). After instilling changes after their input to his initial performance of a particular C minor fugue, Hill later finds all the takes but the initial one to be “horribly false and contrived” (Hill, 2009, p. 13). From this he deduces that “the first rule of studio recording is to be true to oneself” (Hill, 2009, p. 14). Hill also contends that the most time effective way to record is in short takes and focus on one passage at a time which enables easier editing also. However, he also acknowledges that repeating the same

passage time after time can make the playing feel forced and that longer takes “enable one to lose oneself in the music, to forget the intimidating gaze of the microphone and (one hopes) to start to create” (Hill, 2009, p.14).

### 3. Personal Experiences with Recording

#### 3.1 Live stream

Due to the covid19 pandemic during 2020 many performing arts turned to live streaming in order to reach audiences safely. As a result, I have also had my first experiences performing during a live stream, on two occasions. The first was a concert with the Malmö Academy of Music orchestra in Helsingborg and the second was for a ceremonial function in Lund where I performed as a part of a string quartet.

Both instances felt different than a conventional performance, though I found that the presence of cameras and microphones were more conspicuous in the quartet setting and made it more obvious that we were being watched and listened to by an anonymous audience online. I knew in the moment that if I allowed myself to imagine how we appeared and sounded on the live stream that it would most likely draw my focus out of the music and make me more self-conscious. Then there would be the risk of falling into a mental space where I would try to hide flaws and take up less space in the performance which is the opposite of what elevates a performance. Instead, I tried to focus my energy on communicating with the other players and forget how my own movements would appear on camera.

The anonymous audience is another factor that comes up during both live stream and recorded (if the recording is released publicly) performance. The fact that there are people listening to the performance in a different room and different location can be off-putting. Personally, I prefer to have the audience in the same room so that there is someone to communicate and engage with and you get a better understanding of the context you are performing in whether it is a smaller intimate concert or a one with a larger audience.

### 3.2 Audition recording

Making an audition recording is one of the most high-pressure recording situations I have encountered. There is a small sense of safety in the fact that you are ultimately in control of which take you choose to send in. However, the process of trying to capture your best on camera can be very draining and tedious. Making an audition tape requires whole movements or excerpts taped in one take without editing, and in my own experiences I have never been fully satisfied with an audition recording. I have found although there may have been parts that went very well there has always been some error or something I feel I could have done better.

### 3.3 General issues

Whilst creating these recordings I feel it's easy to succumb to an attitude of perfectionism, trying to play everything without error and therefore taking less risks. It can easily feel like you are just waiting for a mistake to come and ruin the take rather than focusing on what you want to do with the music. In a live situation it is only one run through of the materials, and while this is a large challenge it feels as though there is more acceptance of mistakes.

I have noticed that whilst preparing for a recording I often prepare in a similar way to how I would prepare to perform. I try to play for a friend a week or two before, and perhaps even do some self-recording to check how things sound. However, I tend to miss out on the sort of mental training I might do for live performance, visualising playing my repertoire on stage or writing down some goals or key words which will help me with the character of certain parts. I believe I neglect this area a bit as I believe that I won't experience the same performance nerves or vulnerability as when I perform live.

The issues I deal with during the process of creating a recording include keeping up the concentration and enthusiasm levels and the ability to be spontaneous or flexible. Performing take after take as Susan Tomes (2009) mentioned requires much more stamina and concentration than conventional performance. Things can also get stale or contrived after playing them repeatedly, and one naturally becomes more tired as the recording session

progresses. Therefore, I have nearly always found that the first take has been the best, which also coincidentally is the take closest to feeling like a live performance.

Spontaneity is difficult when you strive to create one 'perfect' take, when performing you are forced to go along with things even if they are different to how you planned them to be. I feel that being aware that another take is always possible means that it is easy to 'give up' when something doesn't go how you think it should during a take instead of running with it. I will normally listen back to myself during recording sessions, this also means I need to be able to be flexible and fix things on the spot if I notice an issue with my interpretation. It can become a strange blend of a performing and a practise mindset, which would never occur in a live performance.

### 3.4 Recording in an ensemble

Another type of recording situation I have been a part of is playing composition students works within a string quartet. The pieces we have helped to record have been in the genres jazz, pop and classical, and the purpose of the recordings were often for a digital portfolio for the composition student, for sharing later on social media pages or simply to have an audio file demonstrating what they have notated. Within these recording processes the composer often had the opportunity to edit together takes or patch mistakes later to create the best possible outcome. This lessened the pressure a bit, but we were all still aware of the possibility that one person's mistake could ruin someone else's best take which is one of the difficulties of recording as a group. It was also difficult to keep concentration and enthusiasm levels up as the session went on, though creating music with others also keeps you accountable to keep playing your best.

As musicians we fulfill a clear function in these situations of bringing someone's compositional idea to life. The focus is more on the composer's intentions and the music itself rather than our individual performance as it is whilst making an audition recording. I have noticed that what the intended outcome for the recording is can have an effect on how we perform. Making recordings which are to be shared on the internet, social media or on streaming services often result in more focus on interpretational and artistic and recordings which serve a purpose such as an audition tape promotes focus on flawlessness and accuracy.

## 4. Survey and Results

In order to explore how to prepare for a recording and the situational differences between a recording process and a live performance I created a survey which I then sent to five participants, including teachers and students at bachelor and master levels at Malmö music academy. The questions which I included were:

### **Recording process survey**

1. Do you prepare differently for a performance than a recording (including live stream performance)?
2. Do you have certain strategies for recording?
3. In past experiences have you felt more satisfied with the outcomes of performances and concerts or recordings?
4. Do you feel under more pressure whilst performing or recording?
5. Do you feel more comfortable in front of a camera/microphone or an audience?
6. Do you listen to the playback or different takes whilst you are in the process of recording?
7. Do you feel you can take more risks in concert or while recording?

### 4.1 Summary of Results

1. Do you prepare differently for a performance than a recording (including live stream performance)?

Most participants of the survey had differences between preparation for recordings and live performances. Two participants explained that they would try to simulate the concert situation by playing for friends, playing in the concert venue or visualising an audience during preparation for live performance. Only one participant mentioned trying to simulate the recording environment in preparation, by using an Iphone in a practise room or even creating a small live stream through 'zoom' with friends. Other participants wrote they would treat live stream the same as a live concert and also that the possibility of being able to record in multiple

takes and sections meant that they felt the practise phase was not as demanding as preparing for the continuity of live performance.

2. Do you have certain strategies for recording?

When asked the question about whether they had strategies for recording, most participants said they didn't. One participant said they would plan to have the opportunity to undertake another recording session if they were not satisfied with the primary result, and another said that they would treat creating a recording as if playing a live performance, continuing even if errors occurred and that this helps to leave behind perfectionism. I am in favour of the idea of treating the recording as a concert, as this creates a longer more sustained focus and overall shape and it is maybe easier to overcome feelings of perfectionism this way.

3. In past experiences have you felt more satisfied with the outcomes of performances and concerts or recordings?

All participants answered that they were more satisfied with the outcomes of live performances rather than recordings. The reasons given for this were that it was easier to let go of mistakes and look at it as a whole, getting energy from the audience, being more present and greeting the audience directly afterwards. I would have to agree with this, as I also feel having the listener in the same room helps to create a better atmosphere and concentration.

4. Do you feel under more pressure whilst performing or recording?

The participants had mixed responses to the question of whether they felt more pressure during a live performance or recording. Two noticed that they felt different types of pressure in the two situations. One stated that during a recording they were more self-aware and occupied with their own thoughts which lead to more performance anxiety, whereas a live performance they were more conscious of the audience creating more nervousness but not the same level of perfectionism as recording. Another mentioned how recording was a more high-pressure situation as anything that goes wrong is immortalised. There was also one participant who experienced less pressure in the recording situation as they felt they did not only have 'one shot' as in live performance. I agree that they create two different types of pressure, but that

generally I feel less constrained in live performance at least after I have gotten further into the piece.

5. Do you feel more comfortable in front of a camera/microphone or an audience?

All but one of the participants said they were more comfortable in front of an audience than a camera or microphone. One explained that 'when I press record on the camera something happens and it gets much harder to play. Even if the camera has been there the whole time when I press record there's something in the mindset that changes and affects me with a type of negative stress'. Personally, I could relate to this experience. Even though a camera is more inconspicuous than a live audience and doesn't form judgements or opinions about your performance the way an audience might, there is something about the permanence of the recording which creates an exaggerated self-awareness which I think can be detrimental.

6. Do you listen to the playback or different takes whilst you are in the process of recording?

All participants answered that they listen to the takes or playback whilst in the process of recording. They were all in agreement that it was helpful to listen and get feedback in order to further improve the recording. One participant responded that they found it useful to make 2 or 3 takes in a row, then take a longer break and listen to them later that day or the following to have some distance and be objective about how the recordings were sounding. They then later would record more if they had found some things they would like to change or make better when they had regained their energy and motivation. I find that listening to recordings straight after making them makes me feel quite critical to my playing and I have found it more useful to have a break before listening to them. I then try to be objective as possible when listening and try to identify what I need to focus on next if I am to continue with more recording.

7. Do you feel you can take more risks in concert or while recording?

The final question was whether the participants believed they took more risks in a live concert or recording. Most answered that they felt they took more risks in a live performance, despite having the safety net of being able to do more takes in a recording. One participant explained

that during recording they felt the pressure to play perfectly, and in contrast during live performance they could “take more risks even though I might miss some notes, it does not have to be “perfect”. After all we are musicians not robots playing an instrument”. Another participant said that it was easier to take risks knowing that the outcome would not be remembered in the same way or be accessible afterwards as a recording is. In my opinion the live performance is a more spontaneous setting and there is no chance to change or restart once you start playing. It is because of this that it feels a bit more enticing to take risks, whereas a recording feels as though it should not include errors and therefore the playing becomes a ‘safer’ version.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In her chapter on sound recording, Fabian (2008) has conducted a survey similar to that which I have created for this thesis. The survey she created “aimed to explore the perceived differences between concert performance and studio recording with three additional open-ended questions.”(Fabian, 2008, p.9) From the results she found that all participants noted there was “aesthetic and experiential differences” between recording and live performance and that they strived to make the difference between performance and recording as little as possible for the listener.

From the survey results Fabian (2008) deduced six main issues attached to recording: risk taking, nervousness, repeatability, technical precision, spontaneity and excitement and audience impact. In this discussion section I would like to present similar issues, however I have found that many of the issues with recording are in fact dichotomies. I have observed in my participants responses and my own personal experiences that the different qualities and possibilities that arise in a recording situation can impact the quality of the creative musical outcome in both positive and negative ways. For example, the possibility of having multiple takes can allow a performer a better chance of perfecting their performance, but it also takes away the ephemeral quality of a live performance and repetition of the material during recording which can render the interpretation contrived. The themes I have chosen to discuss include risk taking and perfectionism, the presence of the camera or the presence of audience, pressure and focus, self-awareness, and ultimately how to prepare for recording situations.

### **Perfectionism/Risk taking**

Recordings have long been held as an ideal, perfect representation of a musical performance. The ability to cut and edit has created high standards for recordings and the permanent nature of recording also can lead to the impression that errors are unacceptable. The idea of capturing a flawless performance is what I believe creates a 'safer' version of playing, adhering to stylistic traditions and not allowing for any wrong notes. As Susan Tomes writes, "Instead of having a wide and free perspective... you focus instead on reliability and on the surface perfection of your own part" (Tomes, 2009, p. 11). Skoogh (2019) also mentions that focusing on playing error-free "puts creative constraints on the individual musician" (Skoogh & Frisk, 2019, p. 2). The attitude of perfectionism can be seen as the inverse of risk-taking, and during recording situations it is easy to favour a safer version of playing in an attempt to play 'perfectly'. In Fabian's survey, most participants (79.49%) answered 'no' to the question of 'Are you taking more risks in the studio than in live concerts?' (Fabian, 2008, p. 8). Fabian (2008) notes that this is an interesting result, as being in the recording studio one should feel as though they have more chances for correction and therefore feel more compelled to take risks.

The survey I created contained a very similar question- 'Do you feel you can take more risks in concert or while recording?'. The results contained varied responses, one who agreed with the idea that if there are more takes during recording then there is more space to take risks, another who acknowledged that logically, it should be easier to take risks in recording however they felt more restrained by a perfectionist attitude. Most recognized that the issue of perfectionism hindered them from being able to take risks. I have observed that the nature of recording and the ability to do things over means you can avoid errors more than in live performance, but it also creates pressure to not have any mistakes on the final version. Perhaps what could be helpful is to realize that musical risk-taking can help one to get further away from a perfectionist behaviour, and may improve musical performance during a recording process.

## **Audience vs Camera**

The presence of an audience in comparison to a camera or microphone is another large discrepancy between a recorded or live performance that can affect the performer. I have observed as a musician and above all as a music student that the practise, training and tutoring we undertake is greatly focused on live performance situations, whether it be concerts, exams, auditions or masterclasses. We are taught to have the audience as a point to focus our energy and express our musical ideas towards, and for many the audience also triggers nervousness which can either help or hinder a performer. In the article *Negotiating liveness: LSO live*, the interviews with orchestra members also reveal that some feel uncomfortable or restricted around the recording equipment commenting “you don’t want to sit thinking ‘microphone’, you want to sit thinking ‘music’” (Aguilar, 2014, p. 263).

Grieg (2009) explains that “In concerts ... the performance can only be as good as the moment allows, and thus human error and the possibility that things will go wrong is, if not desired, at least accepted” (Grieg, 2009, p. 27) in contrast to how the microphone “confronts the performer as an inhuman critic” (Grieg, 2009, p.16). The social factor of the audience can influence how the musician feels whilst playing, many feel motivated and supported by the listeners while others may prefer the impartiality of the recording equipment.

The survey participants’ responses reflected this when asked the question “Do you feel more comfortable in front of a camera/microphone or an audience?”. The majority chose audience, though there was one who felt more comfortable in front of a camera or microphone. The motivations for why some felt more comfortable in front of the audience included that they felt more present in the moment with an audience in front of them, they received energy from the audience and they were able to let go of any thoughts of perfectionism.

In my opinion, the experience of playing for a live audience is much more inspiring. I feel more motivated to create an atmosphere and become more concerned with artistry and musical intent than technical precision. Despite this I also become more nervous before concerts and have a harder time regulating my emotions, possibly because the outcome can feel more uncertain than in the more controlled environment of recording. It is this control factor which seems to make some feel more at ease during recording sessions. It would of course be possible to bring a few friends as a makeshift audience whilst recording, however it might not be practical for

them to sit through the whole recording session and perhaps still wouldn't have the same feeling as organising a concert or other live performance.

### **Pressure and Focus**

Pressure and focus are two things that in my experience largely differ between recording and live performance situations. I often feel the pressure of the recording at the beginning of the session which heightens my concentration, but it soon subsides and the further the process goes on the less focus I have. In my opinion this is one of the most difficult parts of recording during a longer session, it is no longer a one-time interpretation where you give as much as you can in terms of energy and focus, but a prolonged procedure where you are meant to switch between a self-critical mindset and a performance mindset.

Susan Tomes also makes note of the difference between only having “one chance to give your best” and “playing your chosen repertoire at high intensity for hours on end” (Tomes, 2009, p.10). It may be more difficult to tap into a flow state when recording, which Peter Hill (2009) discusses. He states he favours longer takes which allow him to enter that state of ‘careless rapture’ which can be found in live performance (Hill, 2009 p.15).

The responses for the survey question of whether ‘you feel under more pressure whilst performing or recording?’ revealed that some participants felt there wasn't one situation which they felt more pressure only that they experienced different types of pressure. One explained that during a concert they felt an extended pressure during the whole concert which perhaps enabled them to focus the whole way through, but they felt a more concentrated pressure on particular difficult parts of the music during the recording. Others said that again the permanence of the recording created more pressure and another said conversely that the fact that there's only ‘one chance’ in live performance made it a more high pressure experience. Certain mental training techniques may help to keep focus and concentration during a recording session, such as breathing and recentering between takes or visualisation during preparation for the session.

### **Self-Awareness**

Another question asked in the survey was ‘Do you listen to the playback or different takes whilst you are in the process of recording?’. Personally, I feel that recording to my own playing can make me more aware of every movement and sound I am making. Listening to the recording during the process can also sometimes add to this self-awareness, which can help to gain perspective into what to change in your instrumental playing to better shape your interpretation though I can also feel I fall into a self-critical state which hinders me rather than helps me. Susan Tomes describes this phenomenon in her chapter about recording as an ensemble, where each player can end up in “a bell jar of self-consciousness” (Tomes, 2009, p.11).

Grieg also describes how the recording process is “a more critical and self-critical space than the concert hall” though he also notes how the playback can deliver “a very different and immensely valuable engagement with their own performances” (Grieg, 2009, p. 20).

The survey responses relating to the playback question were all positive towards listening to the recordings between takes. Many wrote that it helped to get an idea of what to change and how to practise more effectively. One also noted that the places which they perhaps didn't think went so well might sound less problematic in the recording. Another wrote that they would normally try to make two to three long consecutive takes, then take a break and get some distance from them before listening. They would then later that day or in the next following days start with another session, keeping in mind any changes they might make in approach from the first time.

Throughout the survey responses self-awareness was also brought up when describing how the participants experienced pressure during recording or how comfortable they were in front of a camera or microphone. One wrote that they could feel as though they were playing well in the practise room and feeling confident about their sound but as soon as they pressed play on their recording device this changed and suddenly it became a lot more difficult to play as they had been. I believe that one reason for this could be that self-awareness that interrupts the flow state often found in the practise room.

Another wrote that during recording they felt a lot more pressure due to being caught up in their own thoughts on their playing and self-awareness than in live performance. I believe that this self-awareness can be useful when you are in the process of improving your performance yet when performing I think it is important to have a focus on the music and expression rather than how you yourself are playing in that moment.

## **Preparation**

How one prepares successfully for a recording is not so easy to pinpoint. When asked whether they were more satisfied in general with recordings or performances all participants answered live performances and concerts. To me this also makes sense, due to our training as musicians predominantly being focused on live performance. The recording situation tends to be more drawn out and includes the need to correct mistakes and be ready to continually do better and change things on the spot. For the LSO live label the musicians needed to be concentrated not only during the live performance but also the dress rehearsal and if things didn't go quite right even during an additional session after the concert which of course is not the ideal time energy and enthusiasm-wise (Aguilar, 2014). Tomes also explains how an ensemble recording session would be carried out: "10am (after an hour of warming up) and runs through until the evening, or until everyone feels too tired to go on" (Tomes, 2009, p. 10).

When asked about strategies for recording, the survey participants mostly didn't have any thoughtful approach to help get the best out of their session. One noted they would ensure they have the chance if needed to go back and fix something, giving themselves extra time in just in case they weren't satisfied with the initial recording session. Another said that their strategy was to simply treat the recording as a concert, let mistakes happen and try not to succumb to a perfectionist attitude. I feel that this strategy resonates with me, as I feel the biggest hindrance is perfectionism when recording. I also believe that having the concert mindset of only having one chance can help to elevate the performance during recording.

When asked about preparation for recording, the difference in the answers for recording and performance were generally about the mental aspect and event training. Some said that they would try to recreate the situation of a live performance before a concert but only one had the same consideration for a recording situation. The participant wrote "I imagine that I am performing in front of a camera rather than for an audience. When I practice the pieces that I will perform, I use my phone to record as it was a recording or a live stream. Also, I have called my friends on zoom and made them listen. That gives me a chance to imagine that I am performing for a camera/recording/live stream." I agree with this method of mental preparation

and believe that self-recording whilst practising would help to acclimatize to the feeling of being recorded and try to use the self-awareness and critical thinking in a way which helps create a stronger musical interpretation. Furthermore, the layout of the recording process could be taken into account such as; how long before taking a break, over how many days the recording session would span and perhaps setting deadlines could make the process more successful.

In conclusion, it seems that there are large differences between live performance and recordings from both the performer and listeners' perspective. A more specialised training and approach could be useful for the recording process, and I believe that particularly during this past year it has become more apparent how important it is as a musician to be able to successfully create recordings which properly represent not only ones' technical proficiency but also artistry and creativity. Becoming more familiar with recording through self-recording in practise sessions, planning recording sessions with our psychic and physical energy levels in mind and addressing what issues we personally find difficult with recording could all be beneficial to this.

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