

# musical performance

a n i n t e r n a t i o n a l j o u r n a l

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## REFLECTIONS PERFORMANCES/AUDIENCES/ RECORDINGS

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## Editorial

Basil Tschaikov

For a long time there has been the need for a music journal that will satisfy all music lovers – composers, performing musicians and their audiences. One that will deal with musical matters seriously and in depth in a manner that is comprehensible to those who may not be specialists in that particular field of music. *Musical Performance* is dedicated to that end. At the same time *Musical Performance* will seek to bring together the current state of knowledge in as wide an area of musical performance as possible; to stimulate further study, and to inaugurate study in areas that are changing, developing, and arising worldwide.

This first issue is *Reflections*, produced in association with the Music Performance Research Centre (MPRC) in London. The MPRC's *raison d'être* is providing the opportunity for all music lovers, composers, performers, students, researchers, and those who may only wish to hear music for its own sake, to listen (and in some cases see, as well) recordings of public performances of the always increasing past, which are otherwise not available. In this issue Jon Tolansky, its Administrator, outlines the formation and development of the Centre and the many hurdles that had to be surmounted before its inauguration. He also provides, in the final article in this issue, a selective catalogue of the current MPRC holdings of archive-recordings, audio and video, available to visitors to the Centre's Listening Studio.

The voice of the musician engaged in performing in the concert hall or opera house is rarely heard, nor do we hear from members of the audience, other than in the writings of professional critics. In this issue a conductor has the opportunity to respond to questions about opera in translation, and other questions relating to opera; a singer writes about the difficulties and rewards of taking the title role in three very different productions of a remarkable opera; two of London's distinguished orchestral musicians describe their journey into the profession and provide an insight into the joys and perils involved in that hazardous profession; an ardent concert and opera lover relates his feelings when listening to music in various environments, and describes the different levels of enjoyment of doing so, alone and in the company of others.

There are also articles about Sir Thomas Beecham and Igor Stravinsky, the development of the National Discography, soon to be within reach of all with access to the Internet.

The next issue of *Musical Performance* is concerned with the contemporary performance of Arab and Jewish traditional music in Israel. This will be followed by an issue devoted to Chinese traditional music.

*The Performance of Arab and Jewish Music in Israel Today* is Guest Edited by the distinguished scholar and writer on Hebrew Music Professor Amnon Shiloah. He

has assembled a remarkable group of specialists who between them cover an extraordinary range of subjects: *The Judeo-Spanish Sephardi Repertoire*; *The Musical and Social Aspects of Belly Dancing*; *Ashkenazi Liturgical Music*; *The Performance of Arab Music in Israel*; *Klezmers and Their Music in Israel*.

*Tradition and Change in the Performance of Chinese Music Today* is Guest Edited by Dr Tsao Penyeh, Senior Lecturer in Ethnomusicology at the Chinese University in Hong Kong. Most of the contributors to this issue are resident in mainland China.

*Musical Performance* will not restrict the use of the phrase 'music lover' to those who enjoy 'serious' or 'classical' music. Future issues will be concerned with as wide a range of music and matters that effect musicians and audiences as possible. Topics already in hand include: the influence of rock music and recording on regional and local musics; music in broadcasting; the symphony orchestra: an instrument for the 21st century? the emotional and physical hazards of a performing career; authenticity; is it possible? jazz: past and future; performance practice and audience expectations in the 20th century.

We are particularly keen to interact with our readers. Contributions, in the form of letters, responding to material in each issue for inclusion in following issues, suggestions for topics, and articles for publication will be welcomed.

Please send all correspondence to:

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## **The Music Performance Research Centre: An Entry into Britain's Archive of Public Performances**

Jon Tolansky

*Jon Tolansky, Administrator of the Music Performance Research Centre outlines the history and purpose of this unique organisation.*

Ever since the arrival of the portable cassette recorder music lovers have wished that it was possible for them to make recordings at public performances.

It has always been possible for the public to record concerts and operas that are broadcast and very many of these off-air recordings have been made, even as long ago as the 1930s, when they were taken down on acetate discs. However, though some of these are of considerable historical as well as musical value, they can only be listened to in a private, domestic situation.

In 1982, four musicians in London decided that it was worth attempting to create an Archive in which recordings made on location at public performances and those taken off-air could be housed where the public could have easy access to them.

It took another five years before the legitimate fears of the representatives of the artists (the Musicians' Union, Agents, Actor's Equity), composers and publishers, and the organizations collecting fees and royalties (the Performing Rights Society, Mechanical Copyright Protection Society) were allayed, and appropriate safeguards, encapsulated in agreements, were completed.

A major concern was the possibility of material being pirated. Both off-air recordings and some made surreptitiously on location in concert halls and opera houses had found their way into an active and profitable industry which had developed as a result of music lovers wishing to hear the reality of 'live performances': performances with the spontaneity and freshness that occurs so much more frequently at public performances than in the commercial recording studios.

At last, in 1987, with considerable assistance from the Musicians' Union, the Mechanical Copyright Protection Society, the broadcasters and many others, the Music Performance Research Centre (MPRC) was established as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status (Charity Number 296895). Since 1989 it has been possible for music lovers, performers, students, indeed anyone, to listen to a large collection of archive-recordings of public performances at the MPRC Listening Studio (Figure 1).

The MPRC Listening Studio is within the Barbican Library, at the Barbican Centre, and is open throughout the week. No charge is made for this facility. The Barbican Centre, in the City of London, is a very large arts complex containing a large concert hall, theatres, cinemas, art gallery and a library. It is the ideal venue for the MPRC Listening Studio (Figure 2).



**Figure 1** The MPRC Listening Studio.



**Figure 2** The Barbican Centre.

Although the acquisition (legally possible for the MPRC since 1990) of valuable off-air recordings of public performances made before the establishment of the MPRC in 1987 is an important element, the primary function of the MPRC is continuing to make recordings so that in 20, 50, 100 years time, it will be possible for those who are interested to gain some impression of how music was performed before their own day. How we all wish we could hear Mozart, Beethoven and Berlioz making music; hear the legendary performers – Paganini, Liszt, Mahler; not be dependent solely on the personal recollections (and prejudices) of critics and other observers.

Now, at the MPRC, one *can* hear how Stravinsky conducted the Firebird Suite with the New Philharmonia in 1965; how Kathleen Ferrier sang Mahler's Third Symphony with Sir Adrian Boult and the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1947; how Toscanini conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1937; how Guido Cantelli and The Philharmonia performed Debussy and Schumann in front of the public in 1954; how Placido Domingo and Carlos Kleiber interpreted Verdi's "Otello" at Covent Garden in 1980; how Sir Colin Davis and the LSO performed Berlioz's The "Trojans" in 1993. At the end of this journal there is a catalogue of some of the highlights of this collection. It includes off-air recordings from the past, dating from the 1930s onwards, and on-site and off-air recordings made by the MPRC since 1987.

As far as is known, very few, if any, of the recordings at the MPRC Listening Studio can be heard elsewhere. None have been recorded commercially. There are other archives of recorded performances (mostly the property of broadcasting organizations, concert halls and opera houses), but this material is not available to the public; and there are several public archives at which some off-air broadcasts may be heard by the public. The MPRC is unique in being dedicated to the preservation of archive-recordings of public performances, on-site and off-air, and being legally empowered to accept off-air recordings that have been made in unauthorised conditions.

It will come as no surprise that security has from the start been a major preoccupation. At the listening booths at the MPRC Listening Studio (Figure 3), controls allow for increasing/decreasing volume, and advance and replay. But under no circumstances can the recordings themselves be handled, borrowed or copied.

The willing co-operation of all concerned – performing artists, composers, their agents, representatives, and those responsible for maintaining the integrity of all the rights involved – depends on the absolute security of this unique recorded material, so that exploitation of any kind is impossible.

Those involved in creating the MPRC had to overcome the natural inhibitions some artists had. It was necessary to convince the international community of artists that a different attitude to archive-recordings was required. It must be remembered that it had never been possible, or even conceivable, that any recordings could be made, other than within the confines of the commercial recording studio, or on rare occasions, on site. Of course, all recordings were financially rewarded.

The feelings and attitudes of very many performers, composers and others are highly complex, and sometimes even ambivalent. Some performers are justifiably concerned that an archive-recording may preserve a performance, or part of



**Figure 3** The MPRC Listening Booths.

a performance, that they are unhappy about. And yet at the same time, they may very much wish that their ephemeral public performances should not be lost to posterity.

It was essential that the MPRC create circumstances that would overcome these fears. Only a legally binding constitution and a consent procedure that would protect all rights could provide the confidence necessary for a successful relationship between artists and the MPRC. Achieving these conditions took time and perseverance.

A Council of Management was elected under an independent chairman. The first members of the Council were representatives of the performing venues, broadcasting organisations and, by mandate, the Musicians' Union (MU) and Mechanical Copyright Protection Society (MCPS). Subsequently, a representative of the Corporation of London was elected to the Council.

Once the MPRC had been constituted, with the essential presence of the MU and MCPS, performers and composers in particular felt confident. When suitable contracts and consents had been drawn up it became possible for archive-recordings to be made on location in concert halls and opera houses.

The procedure for obtaining consents proved outstandingly successful. Most of the orchestras and solo artists contacted gave their agreement and approval for the MPRC to make archive-recordings of their performances. And so, in 1987, the MPRC became operational as the first archive specifically established to preserve public performances of music. Two years later, in 1989, it opened its Listening Studio in the Barbican Library. As at March 1995, it has recorded more than 100

performances at venues such as the Barbican Centre, Royal Festival Hall, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and Symphony Hall, Birmingham.

The MPRC has also been preserving many invaluable privately made recordings of performances that have been taken down off-air since the 1930s and which since 1990 it has been able to accept. These recordings would otherwise not be available to the public. They have been donated to the MPRC in accordance with a new copyright safeguard that protects performers' and composers' rights. At March 1995, more than 100 recordings have been donated, including performances by legendary artists of the past.

Unique film and video archive-recordings of performances can now be seen and heard at the MPRC Studio. Sony United Kingdom Ltd, who provided the MPRC with equipment for recording and for the listening booths at the Studio, have now provided video viewing facilities, and the BBC Libraries and Archives Division have supplied a selection of invaluable film and video recordings of performances that are not commercially available.

The MPRC has recorded conversations with international performers as part of its archival programme, and is creating an Oral History of Musicians in Britain.

Some of the MPRC's holdings are listed in the catalogue at the end of this journal. They include recordings that reveal striking differences between some artists' studio recordings and public performances.

Researching the background to these differences is one of several reasons why the MPRC initiated an ambitious research project, "Performance Practice and Audience Expectations, 1900–2000". The findings of this project (funded by the Leverhulme Trust) will be published in a future issue of *Musical Performance*. The MPRC has investigated whether there have been changes in musicians' and audiences' attitudes to performance during this century, especially taking into account the influence of recording, broadcasting, the media and travel. As part of this enquiry the MPRC is collating responses to questionnaires sent to performers and audiences.

A great deal of printed material, interviews with artists, reviews of performances, and responses to technological innovation, published since 1900, have been examined; recordings of interviews, some recorded over the years from broadcasts, some made by the MPRC, and some made privately, have been listened to; analyses have been undertaken of various aspects of performance – style, national characteristics, and the difference between commercial studio recordings and public performances of the same music, played by the same artists, within a relatively short space of time. All the extracts used in these extensive analyses will be available at the MPRC Listening Studio with the printed material.

The MPRC's archive-recordings of public performances, whether made on-site or off-air, seek to recapture, to the extent that this is possible, the reality and excitement of what occurs when artists and audience interact.

The MPRC preserves the past for today, and today for the future.

The Music Performance Research Centre (MPRC) Listening Studio is open to the public, free of charge, in the Barbican Library, Barbican Centre, London EC2Y 8DS, 9.30 am to 5.30 pm Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, 9.30 am to 7.30 pm Tuesdays, and 9.30 am to 12.30 pm Saturdays. Appointments can be booked by telephoning England 1932 860472.

Written enquiries to the Music Performance Research Centre can be sent to The Administrator, The Music Performance Research Centre, The Barbican Library, The Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS, or faxed to The Administrator on fax number England 1932 860472.

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