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## How Live Is "Live"?

By JAN HOLCMAN

**T**HE AMBIGUOUS nature of the phonograph as a reliable exponent of artistic achievement has been eloquently summarized by Busoni and Rachmaninoff, two keyboard masters, who were also lured into the labyrinth hiding Edison's Minotaur.

"I have been depressed as if I were expecting to have an operation," wrote Busoni in 1919, referring to his first recording session. "Certain notes have to be played stronger or weaker," and the pianist must not "let himself go for fear of inaccuracies . . . being conscious the whole time that every note was going to be there for eternity. How can there be any question of inspiration, freedom, swing and poetry?"

A decade later Rachmaninoff wrote: "I realize that this will remain for good, I get nervous, my hands get tense," but, consoling himself, "if it is not good I can always . . . play it over again"—and he was pleased with his final discs.

Busoni's "acoustical problems" have long been eliminated, and stage fright is common to *all* performances, not just recorded ones. But the problem of inspiration is still a subject of heated debate. Is the performance taped during a "live" concert more inspired than the one captured in the grooves of a disc cut in isolation? Does the recitalist, aroused by an audience into a creative flurry change inside the studio into a Milquetoast, paralyzed by the sight of the merciless microphone? Will Horowitz's flaming fury, for example, cool off at the doors of the air-conditioned recording room?

The new fashionable trend of issuing unique or popular live performances on LP plus the countless available studio-discs makes it possible to throw some light on the confusing question of the elusiveness of inspiration—a study to be carried out through novel and vivid comparisons which expose the inspiration of the listener as well to some severe tests, as well. We can now make careful comparisons between performances recorded in cage-like studios, huge concert halls, or the artist's home, not to mention the unusual instance of a Warsaw music shop, where—believe it or not—Michalowski, a nearly blind pupil of Beethoven's pupil Moscheles,

was accidentally recorded while playing on an old upright.

The emotional reactions to these contrasting localities are not uniform: some pianists become more tense at concerts, others in studios, and for yet another group home recordings can be the most technically and psychologically convenient medium. The idea of the artist playing in the relaxed atmosphere of his home—if any recording session can be relaxing—was not born in the LP era; it originated much earlier. In the late 1920s, Planté was recorded at his residence in France, and ten years earlier de Pachmann had entertained visiting machines in his home in England. The first great pianist to adopt this comfortable practice was probably the ubiquitous Paderewski, who as early as in 1911, in his Swiss hideout, confronted Victrola executives with the old dilemma: If the Mountain will not come to Mohammed. . . . More recently, recording equipment was carried to Landowska's venerable feet, a to Horowitz's apartment as well. These "homemade" discs have given rise to various suspicions, but with Horowitz nobody need fear that he had to ask a colleague, say Iturbi, to execute some difficult trick for him.

Source material available for current investigations includes at least a dozen LPs taken from the more telling public solo appearances of Hofmann, Renard, Rubinstein, Richter, Barere, Backhaus, Lipatti, and Horowitz. Some of them appear twice. Still to be released are a 1938 Hofmann recital for the students of the Curtis Institute, Philadelphia, the little-known broadcast appearances of Eisenberger, and Cliburn's Moscow performances, to mention pianists alone. Ah! Horowitz has a hidden stock of all his recorded public appearances since 1949. . . .

All these thoughts were suggested by the recent release of Richter's and Rubinstein's concert appearances which contain a wordless threat to the critics who reviewed their recital: "Hold on to your seat, for now *you* will be judged."

On to the records themselves. Careful comparisons reveal that the mar of a concert hall performance *at tin*. is reflected on disc, but is usually exaggerated by overreceptive listeners. And while the presence of an audience may inspire performers, the presence

*per se*, captured in the grooves, is also able to excite the record listener, and therefore both "inspirations" should be discussed separately. The effect of the audience upon the artist was readily seen in some of the recordings in question. It is undeniable that Rosita Renard's phenomenal flair, speed, and considerable accuracy (a rare combination) in the concert hall would hardly be attainable to such a degree under studio conditions (her studio Beethoven is cooler). However, it is not less true that Horowitz's studio disc of Liszt's "Funérailles," Michalowski's record of Chopin's Prelude No. 16, or Rachmaninoff's shellacs of whatever you prefer all resemble a live performance in their temperament and inspiration. Could Friedman have recorded Chopin's sixteenth Nocturne more spontaneously at the concert hall than he did in the studio? Isn't Hofmann's 1924 Nocturne in F sharp more declamatory than the 1938 recital reading, even if the fifth Waltz explodes still more vibrantly in the concert version?

Another factor which can considerably affect interpretation is the choice of speed. Records reveal that velocity tends to be greater during concerts than in studio sessions (home tempos perhaps representing the middle ground). Horowitz plays Chopin's First Scherzo, the finale of Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata, and even Debussy's innocent "Serenade for the Doll" much faster in the recital disc. His studio version of the latter is, however, more poetic and sensitive—a perfect choice to mislead the blindfolded connoisseur. Hofmann, too, adopts faster tempos in recitals; examples: Chopin's Fifth Nocturne and Beethoven's March. Whether faster means "better" is another question. Rubinstein's concert-reading of "Poissons d'or" is a bit more impulsive and delicate than that on his studio LP, the slightly livelier mobility not affecting the final impact at all. His playing of Szymanowski's Third Mazurka is more retrospective in the concert disc, yet the Second Mazurka reveals greater flair in the studio version. Finally, the well-balanced Lipatti is equally appealing under both conditions, showing no substantial difference either in speed or mood, his concert-Mozart being only mildly warmer and the Chopin Waltz No. 5 a bit more daring.

While there are no hard and fast rules, the fact is that most pianists play faster at concerts, and this may have ambiguous results. Although temperament often wins by it, technique as often suffers some losses. Again, there are a few strong exceptions. Horowitz's trills in Chopin's Third Waltz and Richter's in Moussorgsky, for instance, sing out more precisely in the concert disc, the quality of the instrument perhaps

playing a part, or for that matter a better pianistic form at this evening.

If there are any skeptics who still don't believe that illusion can play a magical role, they can be cured by the following sonic therapy: using our fashionable splicing methods, add bravos, noises, and echoes to a studio recording of Kapell; or simply rerecord another great pianist in an empty resonant hall. Will this touched-up performance sound substantially different from a record made during his average public appearance? If our skeptic still fails to respond, try the trick in reverse: eliminate all the noises and echoes from his favorite concert disc, play it for him, and wait. A shock is guaranteed.

The future for recorded concerts seems prosperous, especially since wrong notes can be eliminated by "1984" groove censors, and more and more artists are apt to be persuaded to release these recital documents. What goes on in splicing studios issuing regular studio discs is better not mentioned. Not many realize that the "inspiration" captured during a live performance is not the sole reason for preferring a concert disc. Musicians and collectors value the simple fact that the artist "did it" on the first try and not the tenth, and consider the "live" disc a more valid documentation. The common criticism that a studio disc is unable to capture true inspiration should be replaced by a more urgent complaint: that a miraculously spliced disc is a dishonest representation of the magnified technical capacities of a given artist.

To recapitulate, the delightful new Rubinstein disc with selections from the 1961 cycle did not change our initial impressions, and is matched by superlative sound. However, the sound of Richter's Carnegie recording fails to match the sonorities produced during the actual performance. The DGC studio version of Schumann's "Novelette" No. 1 is tonally clearer, capturing at the same time some favorable echo effects. The powerful impact remembered from his recital is, nevertheless, fully evident in the "Novelette" in D on the concert disc, despite inferior sound and resonance.

Since both live and studio performances will undoubtedly continue to be recorded, listeners can only hope for the rise of some Napoleonic audiophile who will clean up the cleaners of tapes and leave the scars of inspiration in full view, permitting us to appreciate not only the music, but the fact that its magic has been created completely by the artist's unassisted abilities. Until this happens, the concert disc will have a marked advantage over studio LPs, but not—as yet—over all good 78s!

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## THE AMEN CORNER



## Twenty-Seven and Out

ONE cannot, as the saying goes, hear them all, and I have just been catching up with one of the most notable moments in jazz history. This was the rhythmic transport during the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival when the tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves played twenty-seven successive solo choruses in the midst of Duke Ellington's "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue." During this performance the audience became pandemoniac, and while I yield to none in my abhorrence of the yawping and yowling which have drowned out so much jazz playing, I am bound to admit that I find some justification here—besides, Gonsalves is not lost on the recording. It has now been "electronically re-channelled for stereo," but sounds splendid on monaural equipment (Columbia Stereo CS 8648). Against a jumping background, Gonsalves achieves an amazingly continuous tension. His shifting rhythmic patterns, his frequently very subtle melodic turns, are fascinating to follow. The whole long expression gives off that sense of high, spontaneous musical logic which is one mark of the finest jazz playing. Furthermore, Gonsalves's tone throughout is clear and strong; there is no recourse to honking, squealing or catarrhal spasms.

In his program notes, George Avakian observes that his remarkable occasion may have owed some of its fire to an erstwhile Ellington rival, the famous drummer Jo Jones, long the rhythmic fulcrum of Count Basie's band. "Perhaps the Ellington band might never have generated that terrific beat," writes Avakian, "if it weren't for Jo Jones, who had played drums that night with Teddy Wilson. Jo happened to be in a little runway below the left front of the stage. . . . From this vantage point, hidden from the crowd by a high canvas, but visible from the shoulders up to the musicians, Jo egged on the band with nothing more than appreciation and a rolled up copy of *The Christian Science Monitor*."

The other numbers on the disc are "Jeep's Blues," a handsome show case for Johnny Hodges' ethereal alto saxophone, and the vivid three-part "Newport Jazz Festival Suite" by Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. But it is the "Diminuendo and Crescendo" which makes the strongest impression. This has long been one of my favorite Ellington compositions, representing him in what

is to me the most striking of all his expressive moods—fiery, elegant, commanding—and it is played here with maximum authority (I could, however, dispense with Cat Anderson's trumpet screamers which come at the climax of the piece).

From this big-band impact, I pass to more intimate pleasures. "Pikes Peak" introduces a young vibraharpist, Dave Pike, together with Bill Evans, piano, Herbie Lewis, bass, and Walter Perkins, drums (Epic LA 16025). This combination function on the same high levels of musical pertinence and delicacy as the Modern Jazz Quartet, for Pike is a man fit to stand with Milt Jackson, Evans is worthy to sit with John Lewis, and Herbie Lewis and Perkins are in admirable rapport. The Pike group are, however, anything but a carbon copy of the M.J.Q. In general the former are somewhat looser, more spontaneous in effect, and both Pike and Evans (playing here with more right hand emphasis than usual) are markedly individual improvisers. They play in a variety of tempos, from Pike's beautifully propulsive "Why Not" to Dmitri Tiomkin's ballad "Wild Is The Wind," which becomes one of the most lingering and lovely jazz nocturnes I have heard in quite a long time.

IT is always a special pleasure for this department to do favors for that grand old—and fast-diminishing—company of zouaves, the early followers of the late Leon Bismarck "Bix" Beiderbecke, cornetist of Davenport, Iowa. I myself was blooded with these troops (some of whom are still resisting Louis Armstrong), and I think they will enjoy "Billy Plays Bix" by the Billy Butterfield Jazz Band with the leader on trumpet, Tommy Gwaltney, clarinet, Thomas "Ziggy" Harrell, bass trumpet, Danny Meyers, trombone, Alton Smith, bass, Junie Saul, guitar, W.D. "Pat" Roberts, piano, and Bob Test, drums (Epic LA 16026). Excellent and lyric musician that he is, I do not think that Butterfield sounds as much like Bix as did Carl Halen, who appeared some years ago in "Hooray for Bix!" (Riverside RLP 12-268). But the old soldiers will hear Butterfield's reverence for their hero, and eleven tunes associated with him, including "Sorry," "Goose Pimples," "Louisiana," "I'll Be A Friend With Pleasure" and "Tia Juana."

—WILDER HOBSON.