

A Century of Recorded Music: Listening to Musical History. By Timothy Day. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001. x, 306 p. 16 illus. ISBN 0-300-08442-0 \$35.00 US

How did the recording of music change over the twentieth century? This in itself would be a fascinating study, but Timothy Day goes well beyond this question. He reflects upon such areas as how composers have related to recordings over the century, how performers have been affected, how audiences have changed, and how recordings have influenced our thinking about what music is and how it transforms our lives.

Day is the curator of western art music at the Sound Archive of the British Library, London, one of the largest collections of recorded sound in the world. His knowledge of the subject is all-encompassing and he is not afraid to express his opinions on such philosophical questions as how composers regard interpretive freedom from the printed score, or how performers are influenced by listening to recordings of works. As one might expect from someone in his position, he does occasionally diverge into explanations of the cataloguing challenges of mysterious international multiple releases of identical source material. But these forays are extremely rare and, for the most part, his explorations concern questions of interest to musicians and audiophiles.

It was of particular interest to me to have Day expand upon an issue that I had previously encountered only in an old *New York Times* review by Virgil Thomson. Thomson stated categorically that the twentieth century's tendency was increasingly to stabilize tempo, making it independent of fluctuations in dynamics. Thomson asserted that it was customary in the romantic period to speed up with crescendi and slow down with diminuendi. Day discusses this at length, citing recordings from early in the century that demonstrate these effects, as well as discussing other changes that have occurred through the century, such as the usage of vibrato,

portamento, ornamentation, tempi, dynamic nuances, performance accuracy, and ensemble precision. He quotes contemporary written accounts of performances in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to reinforce his observations and conclusions.

It is perhaps helpful to outline the four main divisions of this book, for the sections will be of varying interest to different readers. Part I, entitled "Making Recordings," outlines the many technological changes that occurred throughout the century. Part II, "The Repertory Recorded," illustrates how the concert and recording repertoire has evolved throughout the century. Part III, "Changes in Performing Styles Recorded," provides the most interesting material for the performing musician; and Part IV, "Listening to Recordings," gives Day scope to explore the many ways that the role of recorded music changed in the past century for performer, composer, and musical consumer.

It should be noted that Day limits his study to the realm of western art music, basically ignoring the other fields of music, and confines his investigation to the traditional canon, without approaching electronic music and what might be considered the avant-garde music of the later twentieth century. The music discussed is treated with sufficient imagination and intelligence that it is never felt to be a limitation. One cannot help but envy Timothy Day in his ability to access such a huge source of recordings and admire his excellence in revealing his observations in such a compelling fashion.

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