The Illusion of Reality and the Reality of Illusion

Nick Braae
Jason Long
Jeremy Mayall
Kent Macpherson
Recorded Reality and Artifice

- Early “high fidelity” recordings: “transmitting a performance which has taken place elsewhere in real time” (Blake 2004, 478)

- Stokowski had “no qualms about ‘enhancing’ classical music…[and] gleefully embraced…audio tricks” (Leydon 2001, 99-100)

- “Real” sound of UK recordings vs. “artificial” sound of US recordings in 1970s (Zagorski-Thomas 2012)

- Glam rock “forced attention on the notion that a performer can inhabit a persona” (Moore 2001, 202)
How is the impression of realism captured and conveyed in a recording?

Authentic persona: “every example, can conceivably be found authentic by a particular group of perceivers and that it is the success with which a particular performance conveys its impression that counts, a success which depends in some part on the explicitly musical decisions performers make” (Moore 2002, 220)

Sonic cartoons: imitative of reality, but distorted to guide the listener to specific meanings (Zagorski-Thomas 2014)

“Naturalised” sonic environments dependent on historical and cultural context of the listener (Brøvig-Hannsen and Danielsen 2013)

Recorded music as a “magic science” (Clarke 1983, 195)
The Illusion of Reality and the Reality of Illusion

❖ How are the concepts of “reality” and “illusion” engaged by musicians, composers, and producers?
❖ Long: reality in live recordings of the 1960s
❖ Braae: illusion of Freddie Mercury’s vocal characters
❖ Mayall: a continuum between reality and illusion for recording artists
❖ Macpherson: the “Chopin Project”—is it real?