

Phonographic Encounters

Mapping Transnational Cultures of
Sound, 1890–1945

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Chapter 6

Mediatization of music, musicalization of everyday life

New ways of listening to recorded
sound in Sweden during the interwar
years, 1919–1939

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6 **Mediatization of music, musicalization of everyday life**

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Music has undergone a tremendous mediatization the last 100 years. Electrification and, later on, the digitization of music media have exposed music to an increased dissemination, both spatially – it can be heard almost everywhere – and temporally – one can listen to music almost anytime. This increased spatial and temporal dissemination can be likened to a democratization of music. Anyone can listen to anything at anytime and anywhere. The claim is an exaggeration, of course (music is subject to both political and commercial constraints), but from a historical perspective the purely quantitative aspect of music’s mediatization has been enormous. Even more important is the qualitative aspect of music’s mediatization. The mediatization of music has affected our relation to music, not only how we sing, play and “create” it, but also how we listen, appreciate and understand it. As will be shown, there is support to the claim that music – at least in the West – is not the same today as it was 100 years ago. The general perception of what music *is* changed in fundamental ways during the twentieth century, from being essentially something one did together with others, a communal activity, to becoming an object, a personalized commodity intended for individual consumption in private detachment through new media systems such as records, players and home speakers or shielding earphones.

Mediatization is a concept borrowed from the media sciences. The phenomenon it refers to has been described as a long-term process where people in their communication both use and refer to media in such ways that “media in the long run increasingly become important for the social construction of everyday life, society and culture as a whole” (Krotz, 2009, p. 24). However, in the study of media’s role for music in culture and everyday life, it is important also to speak about a musicalization – both of the media and of everyday life. While mediatization is about the media’s long-term impact on everyday practices and communication in areas that were previously relatively unaffected by media, musicalization refers to a long-term process characterized by an increasing presence of music affecting our everyday

lives and ourselves. Hence the process of musicalization is intimately connected with new technological conditions and forms of mediation as well as with socio-cultural processes such as individualization, commercialization and globalization. In its broadest sense, the concept captures the gradually changing place of music in social life, from technologically non-mediated forms of music in pre-modern societies to the ubiquity of music in today's digitalized and globalized world (Pontara and Volgsten, 2017a).

The macro level changes and transformations described by the concepts of mediatization and musicalization nevertheless depend on what happens at meso and micro levels. While the mentioned changes and transformations of music may seem obvious from a twenty-first-century retrospect, they were not always so at the time of their occurrence. To the extent they were (limiting the scope to the twentieth century), old customs and everyday practices were soon forgotten, vaporized by the swirls of progress and overshadowed by the catastrophes of World Wars. This does not mean that all changed. Some of the old remained and some merely retreated into the background. The aim of this chapter is therefore to highlight and detail some fundamental changes and important transformations and displacements in everyday listening to recorded music as they first emerged. More specifically the period of time is limited to the interwar years from 1919 to 1939, when such changes were particularly significant. And the focus is on changes and transformations in the way music – both classical and popular – was understood, i.e. in the general perception of what music *is*.¹

As a case the study focuses on Sweden, while assuming that the observed changes and transformations occurred similarly in other countries throughout the Western world (cf. e.g. Ashby, 2010; Katz, 2004). In terms of technology, Sweden was at the forefront in many respects, with national campaigns promoting many modern innovations such as domestic use of electricity.² In cultural matters it was hardly leading, although it was quick to absorb novelties from countries such as Germany, France, Great Britain and the United States. Considering record production, Sweden was at the frontier in the Scandinavian and Baltic regions (along with Denmark and Latvia; see Gronow, 2010; Gronow and Englund, 2007), and it is quite likely that the same can be said about the reception of recorded music.

Sources for the inquiry are various types of press coverage, such as entertainment and celebrity columns. In particular there will be focus on the journalistic novelty of the period, the record review. Partly constitutive of a public audience, the public criticism in the dailies can be taken as a valid indication of what many listeners heard when they listened to recorded music and how they made sense of it (cf. Volgsten, 2015a). An important proviso, however, is that the two dailies under scrutiny are Stockholm-centered, which may be seen as an urban centeredness at the cost of countryside periphery.

I have shown elsewhere that listening to recorded music changed in Sweden during the first half of the twentieth century (Volgsten, 2019). This

transformation of listening involves three, partly overlapping phases, each characterized by a different approach to or view of the recording medium. During the first phase, the gramophone and its records are treated as a mechanical instrument, replacing not only “real” instruments, but also “real” musicians (anyone can play the gramophone). This approach alternates with a view of the record as a medium documenting a past event of music-playing, i.e. what one hears is a sort of aural picture of the past. Both views or approaches are finally overshadowed (although never eradicated) by a third view, according to which the recording medium is perceived as a generic aesthetic expression (cf. Maisonneuve, 2009, p. 151), somehow representing “real” music in the here-and-now. The first of these three mesophases of change will be briefly described below (for further detail, see Volgsten, 2019), after which the focus will be set on more specific micro aspects of change that ultimately paved the way for the third approach. The findings are finally considered with regard to their long-term effects and roles, i.e. in terms of mediatization and musicalization.

Playing the gramophone before the 1920s

Recorded music in Sweden during the early decades of the century met with a “utilitarian” approach among audiences (Volgsten, 2019). During this initial phase, the music played on the gramophone should be good to dance to, and the records should play the songs the socially gathered like to hear.³ The same approach characterized consumers irrespective of whether the recorded music was played outdoors at countryside fairs, in the background at small town cafés, for dance at weekend or wedding parties or together with small string orchestras performing “gramophone concerts” at posh restaurants in the capital.⁴ The records were *played* rather than listened to. And the gramophone was regarded more or less as a mechanical instrument, like a music box or a barrel organ – even when the recorded sound was a singing voice.

This utilitarian approach also accounts for the marked aversion against the record player encountered in the country’s upper-class *salong*. A machine and a technological innovation, the gramophone mechanically imitated music and thus signalled a culture in decay. Although luxurious cabinet gramophone models, the so-called *salongsgrammofon*, were marketed in Stockholm already in 1917, they did not make it into the heart of the upper-class residences. “Real” music was an edifying activity in which one participated together; in one way or another, not a passive entertainment. Records and gramophones were too obviously tied to mass cultural expressions – anaesthetics of pleasure, to use a phrase from 1910 by the Swedish civilization critic Vitalis Norström – to be accepted by the cultural establishment.⁵

A third area dominated by the utilitarian approach was that of the producers and manufacturers. That the recording technology and its products

were regarded somehow as mechanical instruments without regard to the artistry of the recorded performer was a view held even by Thomas A. Edison, the inventor of the phonograph, according to whom “[w]e care nothing for the reputation of the artists, singers, or instrumentalists. ... All that we desire is that the voice shall be as perfect as possible” (quoted in Suisman, 2009, p. 128). The statement, in a 1912 letter, shows an indifference towards the recorded artists typical of the time also in Sweden. It can be seen, for instance, in commercial advertisements of the Favorite label in 1905, marketing its records by only mentioning the song titles in its repertoire, and the Pathéphon label, who as late as 1916 announced records for the summer’s dance occasions mentioning neither artist nor tune.⁶

Summing up the first decades of the twentieth century, irrespective of whether the verdict was positive or negative, the gramophone was regarded as a mechanical instrument to be *played* rather than *listened to*. It is not until after the 1920s that descriptions occur of the gramophone and its records as something to be listened to rather than played. However, a change can be observed already at the outset of the decade.

From playing together to solitary listening: record reviews, listening booths and living rooms

A change in attitude towards the gramophone and records can be noticed in Sweden around 1920. From a historical perspective, one of the most striking signs of this change is a review of a recording issued by His Master’s Voice of Tchaikowsky’s *Symphonie Pathétique*, performed by The Royal Albert Hall Orchestra. Published in the daily *Svenska Dagbladet* on December 12, 1923, and thus one of the country’s first record reviews, it is quite likely inspired by the review of the same recording in the British *Gramophone* journal earlier the same year (the reviews are not identical). The review had been preceded in the same daily a few months earlier by an editorial report on new recordings, both classical and popular. However, the first report contained no critical judgment as did the second. It would take few more years before critical record reviews were more systematically presented in *Svenska Dagbladet* under headings such as *Grammofonnytt* (“Gramophone news”) from 1926 on and *Grammofonrevy* (“Grammophone Review”) in the 1930s.⁷

The emergence of record reviews in the press is important for the transformation of listening. Similar to the traditional concert review, the record review adds an aura of seriousness to the recording medium, in that the review shows that the music recording deserves serious discussion. A good example is the series of comprehensive record reviews entitled *Grammofonmusik under kritik* (“Gramophone music under criticism”) in the same daily paper in 1928. It starts on November 9 with a critical discussion of the cultural and entertaining advantages of both serious and popular music, and concludes on February 8 the following year with an introduction of the new

electronic recording and playback technology (electronically recorded discs had been commercially available in Sweden since early 1926). Whereas electronic recording enabled registration of a richer palette of details than did the earlier acoustic recordings, the new playback technologies with electric pickups and loudspeakers enabled the reproduction of a broader frequency range and a smoother balance between registers. As put in the rival daily *Aftonbladet* on March 31, 1926, the new electric technology offers “a clear and strong tone distinctly reproducing all the nuances of a recording”.

The mentioned series of record reviews in *Svenska Dagbladet* was headed by the composer and critic of classical music Moses Pergament, who undoubtedly added a professional status to the undertaking.⁸ Besides modern music by composers like Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Pergament took popular music, including jazz, seriously (although not without reservations). Similarly, he took a serious and critical interest in gramophone records, to an extent that exceeds many of his contemporary composer colleagues. Although reviews in other dailies may have been less ambitious than in *Svenska Dagbladet*, and of course not all records were positively judged, the overall impact on the readers of record reviews is likely to have been in favor of recorded music. The record reviews thus work against the negative attitude expressed by the relative absence of phonographs and gramophones in the upper-class *salong*. Yet another aspect of the review is important to bring forth. In addition to adding seriousness and cultural prestige to the recording medium, the record review carries an implicit reference to private and solitary listening. The record review is assumedly or explicitly based on repeated listening at will by the reviewer, even short sections of the recording, which is hardly possible in public settings and quite disturbing when listening with friends.

Thomas Mann’s famous depiction of solitary listening in his 1924 novel *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*) may easily be (mis-)taken as an indication of a widespread practice (cf. Chanan, 1995, p. 41ff.; Gauß, 2009, p. 314ff.). Mann’s listener is hospitalized in a distant sanatorium shielded by the mountains of the Swiss Alps, listening alone at night when the other patients are at sleep. For matters of historical plausibility, however, Mann’s scene should be contrasted to the more overtly ironic one described in a 1923 issue of the British journal *Gramophone*. In the latter, solitary listening to recorded music is likened to abnormal activities such as “sniffing cocaine, emptying a bottle of whisky, or plaiting straws in [one’s] hair” (Williams, quoted in Katz, 2004, p. 20). In other words, one can assume that Mann’s description of solitary listening is more fictional than documentary of a widespread practice, and that solitary listening to either classical or popular music was, in Sweden as elsewhere, a radically new way of listening, emerging and consolidating in the interwar period.

Besides being a prerequisite for in-depth record reviews, solitary listening requires a shielded and undisturbed space.⁹ The cloistered environment

suitable for solitary listening described by Mann got a more prosaic and everyday equivalent not in the *salong*, but in the new living rooms of the modern family apartments presented at various housing exhibitions. For instance, a national housing exhibition in Stockholm in 1926 shows a plan of a small flat wherein the small living room accords a specially designated space for a gramophone. However, the flat of 40 square meters designed for a family of four persons indicates that the undisturbed space for solitary listening was more of an ideal than a reality for most people (Volgsten, 2019). As an ideal, it was nevertheless strengthened by not only the listening practice implied by the mentioned record reviews, but also by the specially designed listening booths, “furnished according to English/American principles”, which the Stockholm retailers began to advertise around 1923.¹⁰

In the first decades of the century, records were sold by retailers of sheet music and musical instruments,¹¹ but records could also be sold by tobacconists, watchmakers and even by bicycle dealers. The first store to be devoted mainly to selling records appears to have been *Musikhörnan* (“The Music Corner”) in Stockholm, starting in 1932 (Sörhuus, 2018, p. 8). However, the music stores boasting listening booths that cropped up in the 1920s usually had a separate department or section for their record sales. And rather than selling a small number of records together with the players, all manufactured by the same company, records were now sold individually to the customer’s own taste and preference. The listening booths thus came to fulfill a function that differed from earlier displays of the technology’s ability to represent recorded sounds as “natural” as possible. Instead, the booths were advertised as “comfortable listening rooms where each and everyone in peace and quiet and in a pleasant environment can make their own choice”¹² – a choice that nourished individual preference on the part of the consumer as well as a focus on the particular record release, i.e. the objective commodity form into which music was steadily turning.

The solitary listening situation offered by the new record stores’ shielded booths thus differed radically from that of, for instance, the old countryside fairs, where one could pay to listen to recorded sound (music, speech, etc.) through rubber tubes. Listening at an outdoor fair had been a collective display in which the listening act and reactions of the listeners were part of the spectacle. Likewise, the public phonograph parlors, *gabinetes fonográficos*, and the *salons du phonographe* that could be found in the big cities of the Western world already around the turn of the century had been social venues (cf. Kenney, 1999, p. 26; Maisonneuve, 2009, p. 37; Moreda Rodriguez, 2017). In this approach, they differ from their solipsistic successors of the 1920s. Although the record store itself was a public venue, its shielded booths simulated the secluded listening space of the private living room. But what, more specifically, did the change in listening consist in?

Om-
byggnaden
av vår grammfon-
avdelning är nu
färdig.

*Större utrymmen.
Flera uppspelningsrum.*

För att kunna tillgodose fordringarna från vår för varje dag växande kundkrets hava vi företagit en betydande utvidgning av vår grammfonavdelning.

Avdelningens utrymme har mer än fördubblats, varför vi nu äro väl rustade för snabb expedition även vid de mest brådsckande tillfällen.

Sju nya rymliga uppspelningsrum hava tillkommit. Vi förfoga nu öfver det största antalet uppspelningsrum i Stockholm.

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PRISER**

I dagarna hava betydande prisnedsättningar gjorts å samtliga de ledande grammfonerna.

Provspeå de nya modellerna hos oss.

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— Sundsvall — Östersund —
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Exp. även till landsorten.

Figure 6.1 Advertisement for record store with listening booths, *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 19, 1929.

Record reviews and the work of classical music

Reviews become regular strands towards the end of the 1920s not only in daily papers, but also in popularly oriented journals and periodicals such as *Scenen*, *Våra nöjen*, *Charme* and *Populär Radio*. The change in attitude that the reviews conveyed can be contrasted to Edison's concern with the truthful reproduction of the human voice. The phonograph and the gramophone had competed in terms of the respective technology's ability to reproduce sound and music as "naturally" and "life-like" as possible. From the outset, "naturalness" was a scientific criterion, although it would soon be promoted as an aesthetic value. As a value articulated against its binary opposite "artificial", this focus on the "natural" entered a conceptual space structuring a new aesthetics of listening through evaluative terms such as "active/passive", "communal/individual", "human/mechanical", "original/copy" – all grouped under the more dominant dichotomy "true/false".

In many ways, the change in attitude towards the gramophone and recorded music (both classical and popular) that can be traced in the reviews corresponds to transformations within this conceptual space. Evaluations and judgments change between terms, turning the formerly positive into the dismissed negative and vice versa, or simply to the discarding of certain dichotomies in favor of others. For instance, what was formerly dismissed as mechanical becomes regarded as human, whereas at the same time, the individual is changed into a positive marker to the detriment of the communal. How the dynamics of such a conceptual space may structure aesthetic imagination can be observed in a series of classical reviews published between February 1938 and July 1939 in *Svenska Dagbladet* under the headline *Inspelat och avlyssnat* ("Recorded and monitored") by music critic Kajsa Rootzén. Like Pergament, Rootzén had a thorough interest also for the modernists of the new century as well as for popular music (she had a candidate degree in musicology). The April 17 review starts with a lengthy introduction that merits full quotation:

Serious gramophiles must – inasmuch as they do not live in their own villa – be something of a haunting for their neighbors. Their daily agenda usually consists of playing with full orchestra, and, if one is to go from some open-hearted confessions in the trade press, some of them go so far as to say that they prefer music in canned form rather than in the natural form of the concert hall. Thus, they have ended up in what from several perspectives can be described as a conceptual confusion. They have elevated the surrogate to an intrinsic value, the means to the end, and thereby overlooked, among other things, such an important fact as that the music of the great symphonic tradition was created for the big room, the public auditorium, and not for a private "cozy corner". [...] As study material, such recordings are utterly praiseworthy, but adequate as reproductions they are not, and as conserves they do not disclose

the whole truth about an individual impression. It is not just a certain spiritual dimension that is missing. There is still also this “one-eared-ness” in the impression that technicians are struggling to remedy, i.e. in that what we hear mediated through the microphone sounds as if the immediately present music were being listened to with one ear clogged. And precisely in the case of orchestral sound-complexes, this deficiency makes itself particularly noticeable. Even in circumstances of perfect recordings and even if it is a Toscanini who conducted the performance. The Italian maestro has an ability like maybe no other to make the air vibrate with intensity around a gramophone record [...] but equal to what he can bestow in terms of clarity and novelty at the concert podium it will not be.

What we see here, first, is that the previously dominant utilitarian approach towards the gramophone as a mechanical instrument has been replaced by a new attitude, according to which the recording is heard as “mediation [*förmedling*] through microphones” of an actual performance, a documentation of a previous event. But as such, the recording is inferior and the inferiority is threefold. First, it is a technical issue, a “one-eared-ness that technicians are struggling to remedy”. But it is also a social issue. Rootzén uses the word “canned”, a metaphor coined by John Philip Sousa in 1906. Sousa’s metaphor was primarily directed towards what he saw as an impoverishment of domestic singing and playing (corresponding to the aversion in the early decades to grant entry to the gramophone in the upper-class *salong*). In Rootzén’s review, the critique is, if not softened, directed instead towards the threat against public participation in the “public auditorium”. Finally, there is what can be described as a spiritual issue, “a certain spiritual dimension that is missing”, which apparently seems so obvious to the reviewer it hardly merits further explanation: “equal to what [a Toscanini] can bestow in terms of clarity and novelty at the concert podium it will not be”.

Now this may seem as if Rootzén, although regarding the gramophone record as a medium (not a music box or mechanical instrument), would despise it altogether as an invalid aesthetic form of communication, retaining it only for the utility of musical studies and training. The technical, social and spiritual limitations of the recording would, according to such a stance, add up to the view that the recording is a mere copy and not an original, not the real thing. That Rootzén does not unambiguously do so becomes clear in the other reviews in the series, in which the aforementioned transformation and displacement of values and concepts shine forth in a remarkably clear way.

On April 24, Rootzén reviews Brahms’ Violin Sonata in d minor, recorded by Columbia, with Joseph Szigeti on the violin and Egon Petri on the piano. Although the gramophone is a mere “mediation” unable to communicate the “essence” of the music, Brahms is said to be “more of a chamber musician than a symphonist” in temper and mood, without “the

genuine symphonist's need to communicate to a mass of listeners – not even when expressing himself symphonically” (Brahms, known for his low self-esteem, did not finish his first symphony until the age of 43). Thus, his music is “particularly suitable for private company”. What these quotations indicate is an obvious reservation, if not negation, of the technology's supposed social inferiority. Rather, given the right music and careful listening, the gramophone record will provide an “increasing yield”. The mechanical is not so un-natural after all. The music of a composer like Brahms, Rootzén goes on to say, may even provide “consolation and security, uplifting and support”. In other words, as a means for individual mood regulation and self-boosting, solitary listening to music on record need not be dismissed as asocial behavior.¹³

An equally interesting revision of values can be seen in a review published on August 28, of Arthur Honegger's *Concertino* for piano and orchestra, on His Master's Voice, with Eugen Ormandy conducting the Minneapolis Symphony and Eunice Norton as soloist. The “composition” – not the performance-as-event – is “eminently recorded”, and similarly so is the *Serenata in Vano* by Carl Nielsen, also on His Master's Voice. By thus speaking of the recording of the composition (rather than of its recorded performance), Rootzén indirectly questions the relevance of the distinction between the gramophone record as a recording of an event and as a mechanical instrument, in favor of what can at least in retrospect be interpreted as a recognition of the recording as a mode of aesthetic expression in its own right. Of course, Rootzén's wordings may be no more than linguistic short-hands for the view that gramophone records are recordings of events, but the fact that this shift in language passes without notice suggests a corresponding conceptual displacement.

The clearest manifestation of the view that the recording is heard as an aesthetic expression in its own right appears in a review on March 13, 1938. Here, Rootzén focuses on the première recording of Robert Schumann's Violin concerto in d minor on Telefunken, with Georg Kulenkampff as soloist and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt. This last work by the then delirious composer (Schumann died in a mental asylum in 1856) had been withheld from the public domain since its conception, and its recent publication was not without objections. However, Rootzén's review is enthusiastic. The critic describes her own listening experience, when “lowering the needle into the outermost groove of the first record”, how it has “something of the teasing excitement of sensation”. In other words, the listening situation and the accompanying experience quite clearly involve playing the record, which could be understood as a manifestation of the older approach to the medium. But as she goes on, one understands that Rootzén is neither merely playing the gramophone, neither studying a documentation or a representation of a past performance-event. She is experiencing Schumann's Violin sonata in the presence of the situation: “as soon as one has gotten a bit into the work, a worthier attitude takes

over and after a few more minutes one is capable of listening to the whole several rounds with composure and a more well-tempered mood". The crucial word is the "the work". The review continues as a critical comment on the musical work, a work that is being performed in front of the listener in that particular moment.

In this case, Rootzén listens directly to the work. The performance is reduced to an intermediate, serving the "essence" of the music. This rather extreme approach is in line with the attitude expressed by the conductor Ernest Ansermet in an interview by Rootzén on March 22, 1936. Ansermet speaks about the conductor's duty of not standing in the way of the work, but reproducing it "in a and for itself". Rootzén's verdict on Ansermet's achievements is "clarity – self-restraint – nobility". The interview is even introduced with a quote of Igor Stravinsky famously stating that, in the vein of the prevailing *neue Sachlichkeit* movement, "a conductor's value is exclusively revealed by his [sic] ability to see what is really in the score", i.e. the notational signs of the musical work purged of contingent interpretation.

Taken together, the reviews published by Rootzén over the course of 15 months in the late 1930s indicate a transformation of the approach towards the gramophone and its records.¹⁴ Gone are any signs of the older approach towards the gramophone as a mechanical instrument to be played (one now "listens" comfortably in one's living room's "cozy corner", without having to crank up the gramophone with one's own hand power, since the traction is electric). The signs of transformation rather concern a change from regarding the recording as a "natural" documentation of a performance event to an approach to the recording medium as a generic aesthetic expression. The record represents a musical work to the listener, which can be repeatedly performed to the listener in a state of immediate presence.

This transformative process involves a change of the evaluative distinctions on several points. First, the social (active/passive, communal/individual) retreats into the background, more or less neutralized. Second, the technical (human/mechanical) and the spiritual (profound/trivial) both shift from the medium to the mediated. In other words, what is human/mechanical and profound/trivial are not issues of the gramophone and its records anymore, but of the recorded music, the musical work.

Personality, movie stars and priestesses of intimate art

Turning to reviews of popular music recordings, one may get the impression that not much is happening in terms of change during the interwar years. Artists are mentioned by name, but not much is said in detail about their respective contributions. Moreover, record reviews remain sorted under companies' labels at least until the mid-1930s. Reviews of popular music are also far less ambitious than are reviews of classical music. This goes for reviews in *Svenska Dagbladet* and even more so if one looks at competing dailies in the capital. Common in all papers is the increased mention of artist's names,

which indicates a move away from the view of gramophones and records as mechanical instruments. However, the change seems to halt at the view of records as documentations of past events. The new records are repeatedly mentioned in terms of the artists having made a recording, which in Swedish is expressed with either of the words *inspelning*, *insjungning* or *upptagning* (appr. “in-playing”, “in-singing” or “up-taking”) – all referring to the past event in the studio rather than to the present event of listening to the record and experiencing the artist perform the music here-and-now.

There are of course exceptions, some of which warrant mentioning since they suggest a more profound transformation. In a May 27, 1934, “gramophone Review” in *Svenska Dagbladet*, the classical critic Moses Pergament reviews a recording on Columbia by “French gramophone singer” Lucienne Boyer, who reportedly has a “finesse and charm that radiates old culture”. And as the critic goes on to say, “one is enchanted as much by her pleasantly toned-down but nevertheless intensive rendering as by her richly nuanced half-voice. Lucienne Boyer sings – figuratively speaking – in dampened light”. Pergament’s position as composer and critic of classical music in one of the capital’s major dailies adds, as already suggested, status to the reviews. In addition, it is noteworthy that he – although generalized as “one” rather than “I” in the foregoing quote – admits being “enchanted” (*man tjasas*) by Boyer’s voice, which is obviously experienced in the moment of listening to the record. And given that the critic also mentions the French titles of the songs, *J’ai rêvé de t’aimer* (“I’ve dreamt of loving you”) and *L’étoile d’amour* (“The love star”), one may even guess that the listening experience has a vaguely erotic tinge, not least as it occurs in a metaphorically “dampened light”.¹⁵

A different exception can be found in the daily *Aftonbladet*, which published reviews under the heading *Grammofonnytt* (“Gramophone news”) sporadically from the end of the 1920s and weekly between 1935 and 1937 under the heading *Veckans skivor* (“Records of the week”). In a comment by signature “Miss Hot” on October 10, 1935, the “very beautiful” voice of the “naturally talented” singer Folke Anderson (recorded on His Master’s Voice) would obtain optimal result if there were “a director behind the voice, just as there is one at the theatre and elsewhere”. Not only does this comment anticipate the emergence of the record producer’s role from mid-century on, but “the theatre and elsewhere” also nods to other areas of popular culture. In particular, the sound film (the most obvious “elsewhere” of the quote) turns out to have a close relationship with popular music and recording. Notably, there was an exchange of performers – singing actors and acting vocalists – since the pioneering sound film *The Jazz Singer* in 1927. The 1930s saw an international boom of musical films starring crossover artists such as Fred Astaire, Marlene Dietrich, Bing Crosby, Maurice Chevalier and Swedish singer-actor Zarah Leander. In the context of the daily press, this motivates a widening of attention. But rather than focusing on film reviews, it is celebrity coverage that tends to allow more musing comments on recordings and recording artists.

For instance, in a celebrity column in *Aftonbladet* on April 4, 1937, it is said that the same Boyer “has a capability of letting her charming personality reach through even something as unpersonal as the gramophone”. Boyer, the reader is told on another occasion (October 23, 1932), “interprets the authentic femininity ... She is not a *grande dame* [sic] with a pied past and a dubious future – she is just a young woman that has become disappointed about love but expects everything of love”. What these comments convey is something that the brief reviews of new recordings (of popular music) do not admit in their attempts at focusing on the product, namely the perceived personality of the artist and the authenticity of his or her voice. Neither are these qualities easily attained by the artist. As remarked by signature “Kid” in *Aftonbladet* on May 20, 1935:

Some of the city’s young singing voices right now do their best to sound exactly like Lucienne Boyer or Sophie Tucker or sometimes Zarah Leander. Which is a mistake since anyone can buy the original on record at any time they want, and since the originals are usually better, at any rate more similar to themselves.

A final example. This time the subject is not Boyer, but the Austrian “gramophone star Greta Keller” who has formed “a school for singing types with sensuous tremble of the voice” (*Aftonbladet* September 19, 1935). In a commentary in *Svenska Dagbladet* on September 13, 1936, by the signature “Dixie”, on the occasion of her recent concert, Keller’s voice is compared to that of Leander. Whereas Leander has “conquered Vienna” with her voice on stage, Keller has made a deep “impression” on the Stockholm audience even before visiting the city – through her recordings. But whereas Leander “is the Diva who dominates the stage from the minute she makes her entrance until she exits ... she is not intimate”. Keller, by contrast, Dixie goes on to say,

is the priestess of intimate art. She is simple but noble and withdrawn in her appearance. She stands absolutely still by her microphone and sings her songs without gesticulation – the expression of the voice and the face is all. Her dark tone is so soft that it barely reaches the back of the Odéon hall, or even above the orchestra, which by the way has faced a remarkably tough task in appropriating the discrete delicacy necessary for Greta Keller’s accompanists. [...] A more intimate and elegant setting would have been more in the style with her entire person and a more tactful and adaptable accompaniment would have made justice to her delivery. The Greta Keller, who in her individual way gets close to us when her voice whispers with melancholy from the gramophone or the radio, one cannot obtain from the cabaret scene. Isn’t this a paradox?

(*Svenska Dagbladet*, September 13)

Now, if we read these record reviews and celebrity columns together (as the readers of the papers assumedly did – they were published side by side on the same pages in the papers) and compare them with the record reviews of classical music, we see interesting similarities and parallels as well as differences. For instance, it is striking that the popular music reviews so often remain sorted under the companies' labels. This is undoubtedly a remnant from earlier decades and indicates that the change is gradual. The new may overshadow the old, but never erases it. However, as we turn to the celebrity columns and their occupation with movie stars along with occasional comments on music (besides music films), we find that the evaluative opposition between active and passive is more or less gone. The listener is not assumed to be acknowledged in or partake in music-making to any considerable extent. The listener is non-active just like the movie spectator, but listening is no longer articulated against or contrasted with its opposite playing and singing (or, as would be the case in film, acting).

The distinction between the communal and the individual remains, but is rather shifted to the unquestioned advantage of the individual. The star is an individual articulated in contrast to the everyday woman and man, turning the communal into an inarticulate mass. The listener is invited to escape the everyday by being personally invited by the star. This can be observed on two accounts. The listener is addressed as an individual by the artist on record. The listener is invited to become the “you” of the songs, as in Boyer's *J'ai rêvé de t'aimer*. This effect is heightened by the new “whispering” vocal technique made possible by the electric microphone in the late 1920s, and is widely embraced by the new “gramophone singers”, who also embraced the particular attitude of addressing its audience. As put by a Swedish radio producer; “it's not a great auditorium they're addressing, its *one single* individual” (quoted in Strand, 2019, p. 122). And correspondingly, as becomes abundantly clear in comments such as those on Boyer's past and future, the listener's interest is increasingly focused on the individual artist, on the artist's history and individual *personality*.

This focus on personality quite obviously differs from what Rootzén describes in her reviews of classical music. Listening to the music of a Brahms, for instance – reportedly suitable for “private company” – is directed towards the *work* (e.g. Brahms' Violin Sonata in d minor). No doubt, Rootzén pays due attention to musicians and conductors too; but rather than their personality, her interest lay in the universal human character expressed by the work of music (cf. Pontara and Volgsten, 2017b; Volgsten, 2021).

The paradox reported by Dixie in her column has to do with exactly this focus on personality (rather than character), perceived by the individual listener as a private and intimate experience: how can it be that the artist seems to get closer to the listener “from the gramophone or the radio” than live on stage? Part of the answer is of course the increased solitary listening, made possible by an increase of available private space at home, such as the modern living room with its electric power outlets. Solitary listening

was also implicitly promoted by the activity of the record reviewer and the availability of shielded listening booths in the new record stores, where one could freely choose and listen to records by artists whose personal voices one found attractive. But how can the voice heard through the mechanic apparatus be humanly expressive, and even more so than the face-to-face encounter?

The solution to the paradox can be found in the same source material, which inverts the distinction between original and copy. Despite the references to the records as recordings (i.e. *inspelning*, *insjungning* or *upptagning*), it is the record and not the past performance event that constitutes the original. In the words of signature “Kid”, “[A]nyone can buy the original on record”, the latter of which can thus be repeatedly played and listened to. The statement may seem to be a single occurrence of an odd attitude. However, the close relation between popular music and sound film is obvious when it comes to how it was reported in the press. And experiencing the visual presentation of film as a fictional reality should be no more difficult than hearing the aural presentation of records as one.

There are further indications that the solution to the paradox is to be found in relation to experiencing film. For instance, in *Svenska Dagbladet* on September 15, 1935, the signature Z-a. criticizes a Danish film actress who is marketed as one-of-a-kind with the *diseuses* (speaking actresses influencing the cabaret tradition) Boyer and Keller, but who in contrast to the named song stars entirely lacks “personality”. The word is written in English (not Swedish) on two occasions in the column, which indicates that “personality” may be an imported quality, a stylistic trait from Hollywood. Nevertheless, that personality would be a fictional trait, a rehearsed *persona*, does not seem to be a problem. The technique of cinematically constructing a sense of “reality” is even brought to the fore explicitly in a lengthy essay in *Svenska Dagbladet* on May 24, 1933, devoted to the recently published study *Film als Kunst* (“Film as Art”) by the German scholar Rudolf Arnheim.

In other words, the readers of the dailies can be assumed to be at least slightly familiar with the artificiality of the sense of “reality” appearing on screen in a fictional present tense. And it is not unlikely that this voyeur-auditeur approach had an impact on the new way of listening to and experiencing music.¹⁶ This is not to say that sound film would in any way be a necessary condition for listening to recorded music. What can be inferred is that popular music recordings, like their classical counterparts albeit in distinct ways, were increasingly heard by their listeners as generic aesthetic expressions.¹⁷

Mediatization of presence, musicalization of everyday life

The journalistic coverage of classical and popular music, found in reviews and celebrity columns of the Swedish daily press during the interwar years, differ in their subject matter. Reviews of classical music tend to focus on a

fictional (or at least, ontologically problematic) object, the musical work (cf. Volgsten, 2015b). Popular music coverage significantly attends to the personal voice, the voice of a personality equally fictional, the artist's persona. However, both types of coverage recognize a new mode of musical communication through the generic aesthetic expression of the recording medium, a mode distinguished by a peculiar sense of presence. This is a kind of phonographic presence "here-and-now" in need of further study (metaphysically, phenomenologically and ideologically), which involves both temporal and spatial aspects. By contrast, the presence of the early century's mechanical instrument was not mediated, it was face to face (and the civilization critic of the upper-class *salong* would not face a machine). The documented performance, on the contrary, did not distinguish itself by the presence of the performance at all, but by its absence, its past tense.

In terms of long-term mediatization processes, by which Sweden exemplifies how a country can be peripheral in cultural respect without being ignorant or backward (in many technical matters it was, or was soon to become, among the leading), one can see both how the recording technology changed the way music was perceived and listened to during the twentieth century, and how everyday use changed the technology and its use. The interwar matters are particularly significant. On the one hand, passive listening to recorded sound by necessity places active playing and singing in the back seat. On the other hand, non-technological, everyday factors such as living rooms and record reviews in daily papers invite solitary listening at the expense of collective face-to-face participation.¹⁸ And as the century continues, this solitary listening spawns a continuing demand for specially designed home equipment and mobile listening devices (teenage-room record players, cassette radios, the Walkman etc.; see Volgsten, 2021).

On a more abstract level of the medium, the natural grooves of the phonogram record are carriers of both immaterial form and its sounding materialization (a dual message that the phonogram transports as an enclosed sign from sender to receiver; see Volgsten, 2015b), affording the conspicuously twentieth-century notion of an abstract Platonic work. Less abstract but technically advanced, the electric microphone enables the intimate whispering vocal technique that seemed to bring the personal singer of the interwar years in private contact with its listener. After the Second World War, the technology would consecutively open up for the imaginative work of the sound producer and the creation of all sorts of ambiances, atmospheres and sonorous effects. At the same time, classical and popular music will both affect each other in terms of work aesthetics as well as personalized modes of listening.

The long-term musicalization, in turn, has to do with how music through these media increasingly becomes part of everyday life. As a commodity with a certain phonographic presence, music becomes available for purposes that were previously virtually unthinkable. While the accessibility is unquestionably a side of music's mediatization, musicalization refers to the parts of the transformation process that are irreducibly musical. It is a

completely new role that the music has come to play in the private sphere, where undisturbed listening to an increasingly personal selection of artists and genres not only becomes possible but fully normal. And as the reviews and columns of the daily press during the interwar years indicate, music increasingly comes to function as a constantly available means for individual mood regulation, self-reflexivity and identification (DeNora, 2000; Pontara and Volgsten, 2017a, 2017b; Volgsten, 2021). Together with the work as aesthetic object, with which it recurrently conflicts, this notion of music as “self-object” accounts for what music has very much become since the interwar years of the twentieth century. Music is not so much a collective activity as it is a private object.

Notes

- 1 This amounts to a more profound transformation than merely of “the way we listen to music and the way music is performed” (Day, 2000, p. ix).
- 2 By 1918, Stockholm had its own hydropower station located 132 km north of the city, supplying the whole city with electricity at the beginning of the 1920s. By contrast, in a country where more than 80% of the population resided in rural areas, only 65% of the countryside households had electricity by 1939 (Hallertd and Lindroth, 1992). Nevertheless, wherever it was available, new electric playback equipment could freeload off power supplies intended for more “useful” devices in the home such as lights, stoves, refrigerators etc.
- 3 The gramophone was introduced in Sweden in 1903 and soon replaced the phonograph, the sales of which had ceased by 1905 (Franzén et al., 2008, p. 144f.).
- 4 To address larger audiences, pneumatic gramophones were used, as witness advertisements throughout the 1910s of the so-called Auxetophone Concerts.
- 5 See Norström (1910). The negative attitude towards the gramophone can be inferred from its almost total absence in a contemporary posh journal such as *Svenska hem i ord och bilder* (“Swedish homes in words and pictures”), and by the almost exclusively negative comments it received in the daily papers during the first decades of the century (see Volgsten, 2019).
- 6 Pathéfon was the Swedish spelling used in advertisements for the French Pathéphone. The Swedish market was dominated by foreign companies, some of which like the Gramophone Company had a Swedish subsidiary (e.g. Skandinaviska Grammophon). The first major Swedish record company, relying mainly on Swedish artists, was Sonora, founded in 1932.
- 7 Record reviews were published on a more regular basis in the French daily *Le Temps* from 1920 on, and in the British *Times* from 1924 on (Maisonneuve, 2009, p. 210).
- 8 In many respects, Pergament was a pioneer, with a modernist approach that was still exceptional in the mostly national romantic climate in Swedish culture.
- 9 Solitary listening should thus not be confused with attentive listening, which it may facilitate but for which it is not necessary; attentive listening may be collective and public and (needless to say) solitary listening may be distracted.
- 10 Quote from advertisement in the journal *Scenen*, 20 1925. Stefan Gauß mentions in passing that the Lindström company had *Vorführkabinen* in one of their Berlin retail stores in the early 1920s (Gauß, 2009, p. 87). Jonathan Sterne mentions the telephone booth as formative for the “audile technique” required for solitary listening (Sterne, 2001, p. 158); however, when it comes to listening to recorded music, the record stores’ booths are likely to have had an equal if not stronger impact.

- 11 In the United States it took until 1951 before the profits of record sales surpassed that of sheet music (Mundy, 1999, p. 79). In Sweden, it most likely happened later.
- 12 Quote from advertisement in the journal *Scenen*, 20 1925.
- 13 On recorded music's role as mood regulator and self-technology, see Volgsten (2021).
- 14 This is not to say that Rootzén underwent some kind of mindset-change during this relatively short time period, but rather that the reviews display a conceptual tension that indicates the transformation going on at a public level of discourse. That old ideas may linger on is exemplified by the conductor Christopher Hogwood likening a recording to "a photograph of an event" in 1985 (quoted in Day, 2000, p. 34).
- 15 That this is not only a case of male (heterosexual) fantasies thriving on the new technology and vocal technique is shown in McCracken (2000), Strand (2019) and Volgsten (2021).
- 16 Arguing from the point of view of the industry, it has been said that after the success of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927, "the meaning of popular music would always to some extent be dependent on its visual economy" (Mundy, 1999, p. 51).
- 17 It is worth pointing out that several critics that shine forth here were women: Kajsa Rootzén, Dixie (pen name for Ellen Liliedahl) and Kid (Ingrid Bruncrona). Like her male colleague Pergament, Rootzén can be seen as a pioneer record reviewer, although unique in being a woman. Liliedahl, by contrast, was one among many female film reviewers in the interwar years, a circumstance that changed to its opposite after the Second World War, when film criticism became established as "serious" and male dominated cultural journalism (Werner, 1976).
- 18 On the persistence of collective modes of music listening other than face to face, see Pontara and Volgsten (2017b).

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