Sounds and Voices from the Past
Using archive material in radio music shows

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This article is written from two points of view, as I am a musicologist who also happens to work as a radio presenter.[1] Naturally, radio presenters are notoriously preoccupied with what they say on air, just as scholars are notoriously preoccupied with critical investigations into discourses of music. In this article I hope to use this degree of self-awareness and critical thinking in a positive way and to combine these two points of view to reflect on my work at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR). I will focus on the two shows I produced on DR's two music genre channels P2 (which is the station for classical music) and P8 Jazz. Both shows make extensive use of archive material and this article will analyse how music and, more particularly, archive material with music and musicians are presented on radio. As such, I wish to investigate how the imagined value of archive material is connected to the values of the music presented.

Basically, both of these shows are concerned with moving recordings from what Aleida Assmann calls storage memory to functional memory.[2] The realm of storage memory is 'uninhabited memory', which is disembodied from time, and which has lost its living relevance to the present. These are the unheard sounds on the recordings – 'memories of past memories' that exist like an 'amorphous mass'. Functional memory, on the other hand, is 'inhabited memory'. It builds bridges between the past and the present by investing memory with cultural meaning and relevance. This is music of the past that flows from the loudspeakers and is reinterpreted by the listeners in the present. Assmann describes these two types of memory:

> On the cultural level, storage memory contains what is unusable, obsolete, or dated; it has no vital ties to the present and no bearing on identity formation. We may also say that it holds in store a repertoire of missed opportunities, alternative options, and unused material. Functional memory, on the other hand, consists of vital recollections that emerge from a process of selection, connection, and meaningful configuration … . In functional memory, unstructured, unconnected fragments are invested with perspective and relevance; they enter into connections, configurations of *meaning* – a quality that is totally absent from storage memory.[3]

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1   This article is a revised version of a paper delivered at the LARM conference 'Digital Archives, Audiovisual Media and Cultural Memory', University of Copenhagen, 14–15 November 2013. Mikkel Vad was employed as a radio presenter at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation until 2014.
2   Aleida Assmann, *Cultural memory and Western civilization, functions, media, archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 119–34.
3   Ibid. 127; Assmann's italics.

Storage memory, however, does not represent a contrast to functional memory. In fact, the strength of this theoretical duality is that it not only allows us to identify the contents of the different areas of memory, but also to track the processes in which storage memory crosses over and becomes functional memory. In Assmann's words, these are not two dimensions of a binary opposition, but should be conceived of as 'creating a perspective, separating a visible foreground from an invisible background'.[4]

The two radio shows analysed in the present article are examples of how the dynamic relationship between functional memory and storage memory is performed, as it were, by the radio presenter. The two shows are highly aware of and rely on the archive material's position as cultural memory. Thus, the presentation on the shows constitutes a performance of historical consciousness, where the most important role of the radio host is to frame the archive material in a time space. In other words, the goal of the presentation is to create a perspective in which the relationship between the foreground of functional memory and the background of storage memory is heard.

However, the two shows use somewhat different strategies to highlight or eliminate the historicity of the recordings they present. In the following these different ways of presenting archive material in music shows will be analysed in order to show how memory is performed.

The 'P2 Gold Concert'

P2 Guldkoncerten, literally the 'P2 Gold Concert', presents and broadcasts historical concert recordings. These recordings may come from the archives of DR or the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) or from commercially released concert recordings. The 'P2 Gold Concert' is broadcast once a week as part of continuing daily series of concerts on the classical station P2 (*P2 Koncerten* or the 'P2 Concert'). However, while a typical show will include a live transmission or recently recorded concert (often produced 'quasi-live' or live-to-tape, i.e. presented as if it were live), the 'P2 Gold Concert' always constitutes a historical recording.[5] The fact that the concerts are from the archive and not contemporary, let alone live, is of course the premise of the show. This is also made clear in the presentation which stresses the

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4 Ibid. 126. Here I should also mention that while Assmann may be correct in arguing that the dual structure of functional memory and storage memory is only thinkable if it uses writing, I will for the purpose of this article view the recording as a form of text or, perhaps more correctly, as a 'script', cf. Nicolas Cook, 'Music as Performance', in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (eds.), *The Cultural Study of Music* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 184–94.

5 Although interesting, the problem of determining when a recording becomes 'historical' is beyond the scope of the present article. It will suffice to remark that discussions among editors and presenters on the issue have not arrived at a conclusion, but there is nevertheless a practice of excluding recordings which are less than ten years old, as they are regarded as non-historical, so to speak. To avoid confusion I will refer to these so-called 'historical' concerts as 'archive concerts' for the remainder of this article.

historical importance and context of the concert and its performers. However, in the presentation we also find elements that are usually reserved for live transmissions. Before we return to this point, we must therefore briefly consider an important aspect of P2 concert presentations: the so-called 'ringside presentation'.

In the working editorial concept description of the P2 Concert used by the editors and the presenters it is continually stated that 'focus is on the unique character of the live concert …'.[6] It is important to note that emphasis is firstly on the concert and only secondly on the works and their historical context. The most important element in achieving this goal is the 'ringside presentation', where the radio presenter is situated in the concert hall and, much like a sports commentator, 'conveys the particular concert's special energy and intensity. … The presentation is characterized by the particular host's personal style and by improvisation based on the mood of the moment and the specific events that characterize each concert'.[7] While this concept is developed mainly to describe the presentation of live concerts, it is nowhere stated that the 'P2 Gold Concert' is not subject to these guidelines. In reality there are some obvious differences, seeing as the 'P2 Gold Concert' is not live and the presenter is not present in the concert hall. On the other hand, though, aspects of the 'ringside presentation' can be found in the presentation of archive concerts (and in many ways these recordings are no different from when we are 'quasi-live', i.e. record a concert and presentation live-to-tape, or broadcast a concert from a venue abroad, where the Danish host presents the show from a studio in Copenhagen with an incoming transmission link).

Most importantly, the *liveness* of each concert can be evoked in the presentation of the concert. As Phillip Auslander has suggested,[8] Walter Benjamin's notion of mass desire for proximity and it alliance with reproduced objects is useful in understanding the interrelationship between the live and the mediatized. Paraphrasing Auslander I will say that with our radios turned on we are trying to achieve the kind of aural intimacy that can be obtained only from the reproduction of sound. The kind of proximity and intimacy we can experience through the radio, and which has become a model for close-up perception, but which is traditionally absent from these performances, can be reintroduced only by means of their audio reproduction in the radio.[9]

One of the most obvious ways of indicating liveness is for the presenter to change from the past to the present tense. In the following example my colleague, Mathias Hammer, does so within a single speak leading up to a concert recording of Sviatoslav Richter:

> And then he entered the stage. Slowly, treading with an introvert gaze and a concentration so powerful that the world could tumble down around him without him noticing.

6 Esben Tange (ed.), 'Koncept P2 Koncerten 2013', (unpublished editorial guidelines; Copenhagen: DR, 2013), 2; my translation.
7 Ibid. 1–2; my translation.
8 Philip Auslander, *Liveness, performance in a mediatized culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 37–40.
9 Ibid. 39.

> He sits down. He takes a deep breath and begins, in the most difficult manner, with
> a sonata by Haydn, so transparent and light-footed that it will fall completely apart if
> one does not keep the hands steady.[10]

We are not only presented with a historical, canonical recording; we are encouraged
to witness a live performance. That is not to say that the listener is made to believe
that he or she is actually listening to a live broadcast, but it is evident that the simple
shift from the past to the present tense in this commenting is a way of changing the
perspective of the listener. By presenting the music like this the presenter is mov-
ing Richter's performance from stored to functional memory. It is no longer only
a shadow of a past performance; it has become a palimpsest, where the aesthetic
values of the live performance are reinvested into the recording.

It is also telling that Hammer uses our general knowledge of Richter as a per-
former to create a picture of his entry onto the stage. Hammer has no way of know-
ing how Richter in fact entered the stage on that particular day, but he nevertheless
constructs a small narrative to create a sense of iconic presence and embodiment.
This is made possible by the recording, but this at the same time feeds into a dis-
course of liveness where technology may be considered the antithesis of an experi-
ence of autonomous art.[11]

Much the same can be said of the next example, which is one of my own speaks.
It follows a performance of Verdi's *Requiem*. You will notice that I have some slips
in this speak, where I accidentally refer to the concert as a past event (ironically this
is due to the fact that I improvised this speak in order to achieve a greater sense of
liveness than would have been possible from a written manuscript). However, my
overall aim here was to convey a sense of presence and almost give the listener the
impression that he or she is listening to a live broadcast:

> A roaring applause to the National Symphony Orchestra and Choir under the direc-
> tion of Lamberto Gardelli. And not least to the four soloists: Sylvia Sass, soprano; Julia
> Hamari, alto; Peter Lindroos, tenor; and Yevgeny Nesterenko, who sang the bass part.
> The air is electric, the atmosphere ecstatic. The music in Verdi's *Requiem* has filled the
> old hall in the Radio Hall on Frederiksberg. And the audience, they love Lindroos,
> the Finno-Swedish tenor, who was almost considered a Dane, because of his success-
> ful roles at the Royal Theatre. Lamberto Gardelli, the experienced opera conductor,
> who also has a Danish connection. He was married to a Danish singer. At rehearsals
> he communicates in half-Italian, half-Danish to the orchestra. At the concert here, he
> of course hasn't said a word. He has been standing on the podium and has led singers
> and musicians safely through Verdi's *Requiem*. Outside, the December frost is biting,
> but inside the hall the warmth flows towards the stage. An enormous applause fills the
> Radio Hall, here on the 19th of December 1979.[12]

10 Mathias Hammer presents the P2 Gold Concert, *DR P2* (DR, 05.12.2013); my transcription and
translation.

11 This is my paraphrase of Tony Whyton, although he is concerned with jazz: Tony Whyton, *Jazz
Icons, Heroes, Myths and the Jazz Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 42.

12 Mikkel Vad presents the P2 Gold Concert, *DR P2* (DR, 10.06.2013); my transcription and trans-
lation.

Here I in fact did have eyewitness accounts that informed some of the things I said. I could have interviewed those people to tape and let them appear in the show, but instead I used the information they gave me to create a presentation that was similar to true ringside presentations. Furthermore, some of the things I said were guesswork and assumptions, at best, and other things were made up: all for the sake of adding a sense of liveness to the recording.

By using a presentation form that emphasises the liveness of the concert and, to a degree, eliminating the historicity of the recording by framing it as functional memory we try to solve the problem Benjamin described when he wrote that '[t]he whole sphere of authenticity eludes technical … reproducibility'.[13] Although I do not necessarily agree with Benjamin in this regard, it nevertheless seems to be a premise or at least a paradox of the particular show: how to insist on the unique character or 'aura', so to speak, of a particular 'live' concert, while relying on technical reproducibility to broadcast it? In this case the answer is to insist that we are broadcasting a concert and not a recording. It nevertheless remains a paradox, because this is only possible because of the recording, and the presentation reinvests the archive concert with a constructed 'aura' and liveness of the live event. The lines between the live and the mediatized are blurred, as are the lines between storage memory and functional memory.

'From the Archive'

Fra arkivet, literally 'From the Archive', is a show on DR's jazz station P8 that re-airs material from DR's archives. Originally the show was meant to be similar to the 'P2 Gold Concert', only with jazz music, but due to issues of copyright almost none of DR's concert recordings could be rebroadcasted. However, interviews, reports, features, and ordinary DJ shows are not covered by the same copyright limitations. Accordingly, the concept of the show was changed to showcase these types of archive material, and consequently, the historical focus of the show also changed. In 'From the Archive' it is not the music in the form of performances or recordings of music which is at the centre. Instead it is the people talking about the music on the archive material that are of interest. Thus, the show has also become a sort of media history project, where a piece of archive material is seen in the light of intellectual or political views on jazz in Denmark and in DR in particular, or it emphasises the role of specific radio presenters. Seeing as the series of shows are only connected by the fact that they are recordings from the archives, these radio personalities have become the recurring stars of 'From the Archive' rather than the jazz musicians they interviewed or the music they presented.

What we may call the historicist economy of the archive also appears to hold sway in the show. Because preserved recordings in general and jazz material in particular

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13 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction', in Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (eds.), *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008), 21.

become rarer and rarer the further you get from the present, the oldest material found in the archive more or less automatically gains value; the older it is, the better it must be. Even if much of the material found in the archive may actually be there by chance or because of choices unknown to us today, this material gains authority because of its rarity, rather than because of the quality of its content. As Arved Ashby has pointed out, this is based upon a linear conception of history, where the paradox is that rarity is 'prized according to its chronological distance from the present yet at the same time must be made available to the here-and-now'.[14]

I find myself caught in this paradox and subscribing to this belief in the value of archive material when I plan and present the show. If I find something old and rare I am more likely to air it, even though it is not of a quality that is desirable. It may be incomplete or unedited, or it may simply fail to meet the overall profile of the particular station (P8 Jazz), e.g. it may contain too much talk against the ratio of music. Nevertheless, it gets re-aired on account of its rarity simply because it is available in the present. I even find myself feeling some pride in rescuing the almost lost material from the scrap piles of history and presenting it to the listeners.

The following example is exactly such a case. In my presentation you will hear me emphasizing that the recording is incomplete, as if this was a virtue.

> As mentioned [previously], we are now going to listen to an interview from … I'll just check the year on the tape box … We are going back to 1964. Monica Zetterlund talks about a production of *The Threepenny Opera*, Bertolt Brecht's play, which is being staged in Stockholm, where she sings 'Pirate Jenny'. And among other things, it [the interview] will be about 'Moritat von Mackie Messer', which you may know as 'Mack the Knife'. And unfortunately we jump into the middle of the show, where the radio presenter is talking about the position of this song in jazz history.[15]

Here you may also notice another key element in 'From the Archive': the soundscape or mise-en-scène of the show (unfortunately the transcription does not do justice to the point I am trying to make). Before and after each speak, clip, or piece of music the sound of rolling tapes and machines indicates that what you are hearing is being played on old, non-digital machines. Furthermore, background noise from the reel-to-reel tape machine fills the soundscape and the presenter talks about the archive as the place from where the show is actually broadcast; this is evident from the following example:

> [Blow of air, chough] Woo, well it's been a long time since someone has had their hands on this. The dust settles between the books, boxes, and tapes down here. I haven't used a broom here in the archive of P8 Jazz recently. [Cough/clears throat] My

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14 Arved Ashby, *Absolute Music, Mechanical Reproduction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 71. While Ashby is concerned with classical music, I believe that jazz' position as an art music, which as an aesthetic idea can be traced back to at least the forties, makes this observation applicable to jazz as well.

15 Mikkel Vad presents 'From the Archive', *DR P8 Jazz* (DR, 06.22.2013); my transcription and translation.

name is Mikkel Vad and luckily the dirt does not prevent me from finding this super cool programme for today. And I think I have brushed the worst bits of dust off this old programme and now I can put it in the tape machine. [Sounds of tape going into the machine] Today it [the show] will be about music and words, jazz and poetry. It will be about beat literature. More precisely, the author Allen Ginsberg. In 1983 he visited Denmark. The jazz staff [of DR] was on the spot, and not only did they get a nice long interview with Allen Ginsberg, who actually knows quite a bit about jazz, they also got a poetry recital or performance or whatever you might call it, and this is where the show begins. [Sound of tape machine being turned on].[16]

However, the archive that you hear in 'From the Archive' does not exist outside the sounds of the show. The entire soundscape is created with an editing programme on the computer. This not only serves the function of giving the show a distinct sonic identity, it also creates a sense of nostalgia by using the sounds of rolling tapes and old (i.e. non-digital) glitches. The sonic mise-en-scène of an archive quite literally amplifies its status as a site of memory,[17] not only by virtue of using actual archive material, but by creating an imaginary archive around the sound artefacts from the archive.

The historicity of the recordings is stressed in a way that speaks to the retromania and nostalgia of jazz, in a way that parallels the fetish character that jazz aficionados give to recordings. Even though improvisation is considered one of the defining features of jazz, recordings fix performances in time. It is a paradox that recordings are the primary means of canonizing jazz, which Jed Rasula has called 'the seductive menace of records in jazz history'.[18] While he was correct in his criticism of the undertheorized role of recordings in jazz historiography, his analysis points to the fact that jazz culture relies heavily on recorded material to form the basis of its history. In this light, the particular use and editing of the archive material in 'From the Archive' speaks directly into that ideology.

In 'From the Archive' the use of a virtual soundscape mimicking the technology of the past also serves to create a disjuncture between past and present. In this way not only the recorded music becomes disembodied,[19] but also the voices from the past. This may place 'From the Archive' firmly within the framework of storage memory. On the other hand, the very sounds that aim to give the listener the sense that the voices that appear on the show are well-preserved relics from the past also point to the opposite fact: that the archive material presented on the show is heavily edited. The tape begins and ends at a particular point, which consequently means that something is left out. Something happened before and after the time

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16 Mikkel Vad presents 'From the Archive', *DR P8 Jazz* (DR, 04.06.2013); my transcription and translation.

17 This concept was coined by Pierre Nora, but I refer to it here in the broader and more flexible sense of cultural memory studies; see e.g. Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2011), 22–27.

18 Jed Rasula, 'Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History', in Krin Gabbard (ed.), *Jazz Among the Discourses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 134–62.

19 I take my cue here from Tony Whyton's analysis of Coltrane and the disembodied voice: Whyton, *Jazz Icons,* 38–56.

captured on tape. While the material used in 'From the Archive' may not yet have fully entered functional memory, it is important to note that the show is not in itself a process of storing. It is a process of remembering, and as such it represents the perspective in which the relationship between storage memory and functional memory can be seen. The design of the show reveals a central characteristic of memory: 'Remembering is basically a reconstructive process; it always starts in the present, and so inevitably at the time when memory is recalled, there will be shifting, distortion, revaluation, reshaping'.[20] The sounds of rolling tapes and machines are in fact signs of forgetting.

Concluding remarks

Although the strategies regarding archive material in these two music shows are quite different, they both use performative rituals in the presentation which rely heavily on the archive material.

Through the presentation and conceptualisation of the 'P2 Gold Concert' as a live event it seems to resist its own historicity, but it is exactly through this mediatized process that a move from stored to functional memory is made possible. The ritual of liveness that is performed by the presenter helps place the 'P2 Gold Concert' in the category of 'cultural memory'.[21] As opposed to the everyday-like and informal manner of 'communicative memory', the ritualized presentation in the formation and organisation of the archive material as a live concert establishes the almost timeless character of the 'P2 Gold Concert'. Benjamin may have believed that the 'technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitical subservience to ritual'.[22] In this case, though, it seems that technical reproduction makes the reappropriation of such rituals possible. That is not to say that this ritual of liveness in the framing of archive concerts aims at giving the listener the impression that he or she is listening to the concert 'as it actually happened'. Such insistence on the liveness of archive concerts is a construction. This should also be evident from the way the presenter more or less elegantly alternates between the position of the historian, as it were, who comments on the storage memory of the archive material and the position of the ringside journalist who engages with the concert event. Of course, this is not wholly unproblematic, because such journalistic ambiguity might confuse the listener. However, neither the 'P2 Gold Concert' nor 'From the Archive' has been subject to qualitative evaluations by the listeners (e.g. focus group analyses or other research conducted by DR), and it is beyond the scope of the present article to do such research.

Much like the presenter of the 'P2 Gold Concert' performs a ritual of liveness made possible by the mechanical reproduction, the presentation and mise-en-scène of 'From the Archive' are highly performative. The show subscribes to a belief in the

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20 Assmann, *Cultural memory,* 19.
21 Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125–33; Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 27–37.
22 Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', 24.

intrinsic value of these archive artefacts and it constructs an imaginary archive with a soundscape of old technology. Here it is the technology itself that is used in a ritualized performance of the mediatized dialectic between stored and functional memory. This dialectic may not be unproblematic, though, because it relies on the producer's (i.e. my) construction of the sound of the archive that is in fact just that, a construction, and as such the listener may perceive of it as fake and inauthentic if he or she discovers the digital production processes of creating such a mise-en-scène. Using such fictional strategies the presentation may strengthen the dialectic between storage and functional memory. On the other hand, these mediatizing, fictional strategies may compromise the perceived value and authenticity of the archive material.

While both shows present archive material that seems to be storage memory, the strategies used in the presentation of this material and the mediatized nature of that material and the context of its broadcast show that it is on the path to crossing over into functional memory.

Summary

The article is a critical engagement with the construction of cultural memory and performance of liveness when using archive material in radio shows and is based on the author's experience as a radio presenter. Theoretically it is framed by Aleida Assmann's concepts of storage memory and functional memory.

Firstly, a show presenting historical concert recordings of classical music, the 'P2 Gold Concert', is analysed to show how radio presenters emphasize liveness to eliminate the historicity of the recording. However, such evocation of liveness is only possible because of the recorded nature of the archive material. Secondly, a show presenting archived interviews, reports, features, etc. of jazz music and musicians, 'From the Archive', is analysed with particular regard to how a virtual soundscape or mise-en-scéne of 'old' technology is created to perform an imaginary archive and how the archive is fetishized. Again, this presentation and the values it holds is only possible because of the recorded, mediatized nature of the archive material.

Thus, in both shows the presenter uses fictionalizing strategies of performance to present the archive material, and these strategies in fact highlight the disjunctures and connections between storage memory and functional memory.