

Live - or is it?

RECORDING ENGINEER TONY FAULKNER LIFTS THE LID ON THE MURKY WORLD OF 'LIVE' RECORDINGS

Back in the cassette era: "Is it live? Or is it Memorex?" was the question that launched a thousand hi-fi advertising pages. A more appropriate question today might be: "If it says it's live on the CD cover, is it really a live performance on the CD?"

In recent years much of my time has been spent recording concert performances, especially those of soloists, ensembles and orchestras for their own CDs and downloads. The term 'live recording' would seem to be self-defining - turn up at a live concert with some microphones, record the event on to some convenient medium, top it, tail it, then send a master to the CD factory. As ever, life becomes more complicated once other factors come into the frame, especially since the march of technology has made it so easy to mess with recordings.

I have made about a hundred 'live' productions for commercial release on CD and/or downloads. Their fidelity to the term 'live' has varied from truthful, slightly tweaked, right through to downright dishonest. In the latter classification they are studio performances to all intents and purposes, with multiple edits added from recording sessions (sometimes several days' worth) before and/or after the audience was present at the 'live' event.