

**London; 17 January 2017**

Our first programme of 2017 was **The Art and Science of Acoustic Recording: re-enacting a 1913 orchestral recording session at the Royal College of Music, November 2014**. To present the programme it was a pleasure to welcome Aleks Kolkowski, Research Associate at the Science Museum and the man behind the project. Regular readers will be aware of this initiative and of the Society's close involvement – see the account in FtR number 54 (pages 330-336) and the report of Duncan Miller's presentation at Malvern 2016 in FtR 60 (pages 191/192).

The 1913 recording of Beethoven's *5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* by the Berlin Philharmonic under Arthur Nikisch was one of the first occasions that a renowned orchestra and eminent conductor were brought together in the recording studio. The re-enactment – probably the first attempt at an acoustic orchestral recording in modern times – aimed to establish how it was done given the inherent difficulty of recording large ensembles in the pre-electric era. Aleks' comprehensive account was supplemented with extracts from the original and contemporary recordings, photographs, voice tests and a clip from the film *Two Sisters from Boston* (1946) featuring an inauthentic but entertaining reconstruction of Lauritz Melchior at the recording horn.

The project established that success depends on a range of factors notably the position of the musicians and, crucially, the size of the room. It confirmed that the 1913 recording entailed no re-orchestration and was an important step towards the authentic recording of classical music. Numbers of the musicians found the re-enactment a more honest and natural means of recording compared with present day methods. The presentation concluded with a short film of the 2014 recording followed by a question and answer session.

This well-attended meeting comprised a considerable assembly of expertise in, and enthusiasm for, acoustic recording. It was an occasion to celebrate the achievements of the early sound recordists whose skills, developed a century ago, are only now being rediscovered.

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