



The Phonographic Record

The Journal of The Vintage Phonograph Society of New Zealand

A Society formed for the preservation of Recorded Sound

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

CONSTITUTION RULES With this issue of the magazine you will receive your copy of the Society Rules. The first Annual General Meeting will be held on September 26th, 1966 and we would draw your attention to Rule XV on page 10, concerning the nominations for election of officers. This year, such nominations must be in the hands of the Secretary-Treasurer by September 11th.

SUBSCRIPTIONS We would remind all members that their subscriptions to September 1967 are now due. To those who have already paid we say thank you and to the others - we would appreciate payment as soon as possible. All subscriptions as for the previous year.

ABOUT PEOPLE This month we are pleased to welcome five overseas members, Major H.H. Annand and Mr. A.D. Besford of England and Messrs Gene Ballard, L.A. Schlick and A. Johannes of the U.S.A. We feel we are becoming truly international and offer to all members any assistance from this part of the world.

We are sorry to report that Ray Ladbroke is back in hospital. He is in Ward 1 of Christchurch Public Hospital and we would like him to know that we hope it won't be long before he is winding up those H.M.V. Gramophones again

Despite the fact that many "prizes" in the collecting game will be going south with Clive Morrison, Christchurch members are sorry to have to say good-bye to him when he returns to Dunedin.

PHONOGRAPH PARTS One of our members has expressed his willingness to attempt to make any small phonograph parts which you require. He has already made lead-screw covers; for details about these and other parts please contact the secretary.

TALKING MACHINES by JOHN CAIN The copies of this excellent book have come to hand and have been distributed to those members who ordered them. We were also able to refund three shillings per book making the all-in price 12/-. We are prepared to place another order but cannot guarantee this low price, nor owing to the shipping strike, the delivery date. Orders accompanied by 12/- per copy to the Secretary on the understanding that should any balance be required it will be payable by the member on the arrival of the book.

BUYING OVERSEAS With the growing membership of the Society and the developing enthusiasm of many of the collectors we would like to draw your attention to the possibility of buying overseas. This can apply to records, to phonograph parts, to books - in fact to every facet of our hobby.

We have on hand information from Graeme Sanson regarding his adventures in this field and would be very happy to pass it on to any interested member. Like others of us who have enquired overseas, Graeme has found some firms much more helpful than others but in every field in collecting we have at least one firm we can recommend. We would like to stress the following however, if overseas currency is involved make sure you can obtain sufficient before you arrange to buy: also if you make a contract with an overseas firm make sure you fulfil your obligations.

TALKING OF CYLINDERS

No. 5

IN THE GROOVE

A.J.R.

"I propose having a cylinder . . . 10 threads or embossing grooves to the inch . . . cylinder one foot long.

I have tried wax, chalk, etc. . . . "

So reads Thomas Edison's laboratory notebook for mid-November 1877.

It is interesting to see how the phonograph developed from this first description.

The first tinfoil phonographs played for a little over a minute - longer if you turned the handle at a slower speed. At ten grooves to the inch a foot long cylinder must be turned at no more than eighty revolutions a minute to achieve a playing time of a minute and a half. Fewer revolutions per minute meant a longer playing time, but a poorer quality of recording, which wasn't very good at the best of times.

When the first of the production-run machines went on the market, they ran at what became the standard speed of 160 r.p.m. They played two minute wax records with 100 grooves to the inch.

In 1901 an advance was made with the introduction of the "gold-moulded" cylinders. No longer did copies have to be duplicated on a pantograph. The cylinders were moulded under pressure and were made of a harder type of wax - resulting in louder, clearer, longer-lasting recordings. But the playing time was still limited to two minutes.

With the introduction of the wax Amberols in October 1908, the duration of the record was increased to four minutes - the new cylinders have 200 grooves to the inch. These very fine grooves necessitated an even tougher wax composition, but did not stand up well to continuous playing and the ungentle handling they often received.

In October, 1912, the wax Amberols were superseded by the Blue Amberol - celluloid record on a plaster of paris core. This too had 200 grooves to the inch, and a Blue Amberol in perfect condition is unsurpassed for minimum surface noise.

Blue Amberols continued in production until November 1929 although many other producers of cylinders had switched over to discs many years earlier.

Edison's association with discs dates from 1913, when he began marketing his Diamond Disc machine which played his "hill-and-dale" flat records.

These records played at 80 r.p.m. and had 150 grooves to the inch. The ultimate in fineness of grooves came with the introduction in 1926 of Edison's Long-Playing Diamond Discs which played for 20 minutes per side. They had the astounding number of 450 grooves per inch - today's micro-groove records have only 275. The L.P. Diamond Discs were not very successful - the stylus often jumped out of the groove, and with the onset of the Depression Edison's venture into flat records ended in November 1929. A small number of needle cut records, seventy titles, was also issued in those last years but these are rare and hard to find.

The story of the talking machine in New Zealand is inseparable from the history of the country and its people. Early Christchurch lives again in the following tale of a quieter and more relaxed era.

TALKING MACHINE MEMORIES

by C.E. Woledge

THE ABOOMAH EPISODE

Aboomah, known as the African Giantess was a negress of giant proportions being over seven feet in height and built in proportion. She was said to weigh twenty stone and had the largest feet I have ever seen on a human being. The black costume which she always wore when on show was a blaze of tawdry jewellery and trinkets. She was well educated, having attended a leading English Ladies' College. Altogether she was an imposing sight and held great attention. In contrast, her husband was an undersized negro about five feet tall and known as Prince Alrac. In about 1909, this combination toured New Zealand under the name of "Aboomah and her Giant Phonograph" and rented an empty shop in various towns of the country charging sixpence entrance fee to hear a record played on the Giant Phonograph and for a view of Aboomah. For a time this little show did good business and Aboomah became almost a by-word. But the lady was rarely seen in the street; it was difficult to get a glance of her without paying sixpence for the favour. Incidentally Prince Alrac played a guitar and sang a Stephen Foster song at each showing. Aboomah stated that the phonograph was especially made to her order which was an absurd claim because it was merely a standard model which had been on the New Zealand market for several years; known as the 20th Century Columbia B.C. Graphophone and fitted with a large brass horn 6 feet long and about three feet wide at the bell perimeter.

When the show was over, a cab was invariably waiting to take the couple to their lodging so that they would not be seen. The time came when business slackened and the show closed down but not to tour further as expected. Apparently financial difficulties were the trouble and the phonograph outfit had to be sold. It was then installed in the Coliseum Picture Theatre, with the horn protruding through a hole in the curtain at the side of the screen. The idea was to entertain the audience with record selections before the orchestra arrived. However it was not very successful owing to the poor condition of the instrument and the almost worn out records, of which there were two dozen of the 6 inch Columbia type. For the later few times the outfit was used, I supplied standard two minute Edison records but the machine was too far gone and was finally discarded. It eventually landed in the Harris Auction Room in Colombo Street and I bought it with two dozen records for £7. Later I sold it to a travelling showman named Fred Foley and have heard nothing of it since. To conclude this little episode, I might mention that Aboomah and Prince Alrac apparently struck hard times because the last I saw of them was on their daily routine of singing Stephen Foster songs in the street, in front of different hotels. They suddenly disappeared and many people missed them and were sorry to hear of their departure.

A DEBATABLE POINT

When we first published this magazine we were told that if we did print anything debatable, it would provoke a response. This has now happened as two collectors, a member and a non member have written to query a statement made in the June Issue (No. 6) in the article "Which Reproducer Should I Use?". We stated, on page 7 that the model L reproducer was the same as the model H except for the side outlet. Firstly, may we point out that both these reproducers are similar in that they both have a sapphire, 4 minute stylus and both are for black wax only. The point missed was that the model L has a larger diaphragm than a model H and is, in fact, more like the model R.

We thank our correspondents for helping to clear up this matter. We have also been questioned for recommending that a diamond point reproducer designed for 4 minute Blue Amberols be used on a 2 minute indestructible cylinder. At the display we held in October 1965, Adair Otley demonstrated to us just how well a 2 minute indestructible cylinder could be played on a machine having a model B reproducer. We would like to hear the comments of other members who have experimented with this. At a later date, we shall print an article on how to make a diamond-point reproducer for playing wax cylinders.

THE KLINGSOR RECORD

In our June issue, we published a photograph of a Klingsor Gramophone and last month we showed you the label of the record which this Company produced. These records were pressed in Wahren Leipzig Germany and are not easily found in New Zealand: the example shown being found in Auckland by Donald Cameron. We will be reproducing photographs of some of the lesser known labels and would appreciate any extra information about them.

COLUMBIA PHONOGRAPHS I would be interested in contacting collectors with Columbia phonographs or catalogues etc. for the purpose of finding out which machines are in the country. Also interested in rubbings off patent plates etc. as I am endeavouring to write a history of the Company and date all machines. I will also exchange two Edison machines for a Columbia. Will exchange Sterling cylinders for Columbia. Write Rod Cornelius, 234 Musselburgh Rise, Dunedin.

GOLDEN & HUGHES Wanted records by Golden & Hughes (talking). Phone Christchurch 517-859 or write Gavin East, 60 Garreg Road, Christchurch 5.

NELLIE MELBA I will buy or exchange records by Nellie Melba. Phone Christchurch 81-430 or write Pam Rogers, 73 Flockton Street, Christchurch 1.

CYLINDER SLIPS

In response to our request for information regarding cylinder slips owned by members, we have had a most interesting letter from Donald Cameron of Wellington who gives us details of record No. 2219 which is a Scripture Lesson with hymn and orchestral accompaniment. This Blue Amberol cylinder by the Rev. Madison C. Peters and the Edison Mixed Quartette is typical of quite a number of this type of "potted" church service and must have been in demand by many of the country folk who lived far from a church in days when travelling and transport were much less convenient than today. The cylinder slip lists details of the people who wrote the words and the music of the hymn "The Gate Ajar for Me" and also of the minister who reads the lesson.