



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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Editorial and Secretarial Address

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73 Flockton St., Christchurch, 1. New Zealand.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

WE'RE ONLY A SMALL COUNTRY - BUT . . . Congratulations to Wally Gollidge who has acquired an Edison Tin-Foil machine, to Walter Norris who has added the rare Edison Bell Ideal to his collection and to Ray Ladbroke who now owns the major proportion of an Edison Opera-Concert. We like to hear of recent acquisitions by collectors, members or not. Even if we can't unearth such machines ourselves, it is a good "second best" to read of others' good fortune.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE OVERHORN GRAMOPHONES GONE? . . . Collectors who have tried in vain to acquire an overhorn disc machine have probably been as interested as we to see the many such machines which have appeared recently in television programmes. Collecting such machines seem to be more than a hobby - it's becoming a way of life. ANY OLD IRON? . . . Once or twice lately we have been able to help members buy and sell to the benefit of both. Please let us know what you have to sell and what you wish to buy. When we get the message on the grape vine, we'll get in touch.

TALKING MACHINE MEMORIES by C.E. Woledge - The Edison Company
in New Zealand (Contd.)

Charles Edison was then put in charge, but he did not last long. He sent us a full plate size photograph of himself, labelled in gold letters WORKING FOR CHARLES. He advised us to have it framed and hung in the office. I presume he sent one to all in the trade. I mention here that the Goodrich Tire Company went into the radio business, but beyond seeing one of their advertisements, I have heard nothing further, but I feel fairly certain that the illustrations were of Edison models.

The stage is reached where the going gets tough; we had to go into radio because it had wiped out acoustic talking machines and even electric recording could not hold its own against it; that is until the introduction of the radiogram. The battery portable was definitely out and the A.C. radio was also out of the picture because it was rare to find electrical mains on the river bank or any other place where a portable is most useful. It was now evident that we would have to handle radio so we took out a sub agency with Philips and did a very fair business but the profit was small. Again another unexpected change - the sudden demand for needle Portable Gramophones and this demand lasted for about ten years. The louder electrically recorded records and improved reproducer brought about this popularity. We had nothing to compete with this line so I designed and made a cylinder portable. (Note: details of this machine and its history are contained in Volume 1, Issue 3 of "The Phonographic Record.")

At last, despite the gradual evidence of the approaching depression, some light appeared on the horizon; Mr. Hewison's predictions began to be fulfilled and we believed that Edison's foresight would be rewarded. For a start we received a clever little fitting to attach to the Diamond Disc machine; this enabled the diamond point to be set in the first groove of the record - even in the

dark. There was another small fitting to clip on the back of the motor bed to hold extra reproducers. This was a long needed fitting because, in many cases the long playing reproducer needed a home and there was usually a needle model to be housed. Several other small lines came to hand including Edison Oil, Cog Grease, and Spring Lubricant. These apparently insignificant items were a help and we looked on them as merely forerunners of better things to come. We were not disappointed as almost immediately the new Diamond Disc reproducer arrived followed by the improved Amberola reproducer: both these reproducers gave increased volume and we anticipated a big demand for them. Then again another surprise - the Edison needle portable. The sample was similar to the standard lines on the market but it did have over three feet of horn, a little longer than the average. This was followed by the release of about fifty titles of electrically recorded needle type Edison records. What more could we want - we were very happy and had no fear of the future. We got ready for business and welcomed the samples of a new Diamond Disc Model, the Edisonic.

There were two models, the Schubert and the Beethoven.

The Edisonics arrived in 1929; I had at that time had for some years, a booklet put out by the Edison Company and written by Herbert Casson, a confidant of Edison. In this it was stated that Edison was then working on the Edisonic - this gives definite evidence of the look-ahead policy of this great man.

Our pleasure was somewhat curbed by the realisation that the depression had actually started and employees were being dismissed at an alarming rate. This made us hesitate in ordering and in the meantime a cable arrived from the Edison Company.

It stated that the company had given up the phonographic business and had closed down the factory. Our finish had come.

In giving you this brief history of the Edison Company in New Zealand, I have concerned myself chiefly with the headquarters in Christchurch but it was typical of the position right through the country. Looking back I cannot help but sympathise with the Company in all the difficulties with which it had to contend during its trading life.

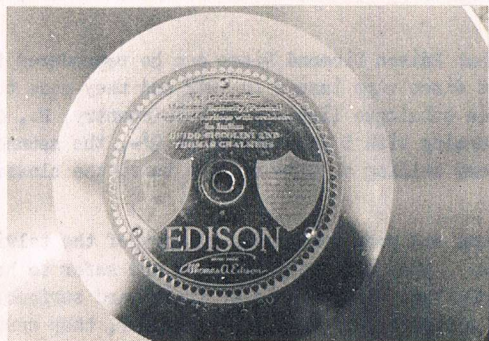
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EDISON DIAMOND DISCS

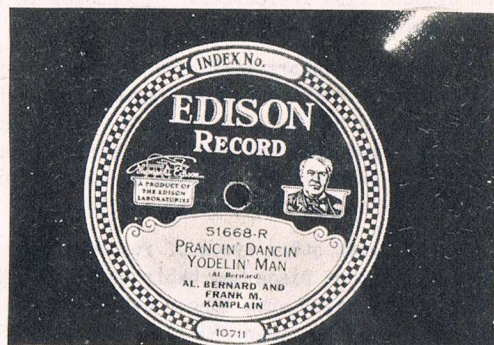
C. THE DISC.

The earliest Diamond Discs had little surface noise. They were made of two sheets of celluloid (of similar quality to the Blue Amberol Cylinders) with a filling of black plaster. However, despite the good playing quality of these discs they were not satisfactory, having a tendency to curl up and the layers to split, thus rendering them unplayable and so to-day they are virtually non-existent. The centres of the earliest type of Diamond Discs to be found in New Zealand to-day are by the photo etching process, all black in colour and the details difficult to read. Many had no number on the disc at all, the only detail being on the envelope. Difficulties are experienced then in cataloguing if the record had become separated from its envelope. The envelopes of these early records contained no hole through which to see the label. \$1,000,000 was spent on research to determine the substance for these discs and the material chosen was hard enough to withstand well the diamond stylus; the finished thickness was $\frac{1}{16}$ " which was considerably more than the usual needle record. Because of the hill and dale system of recording, it was possible to have more grooves per inch than the normal lateral cut record. It was claimed by the Edison Company that the 150 grooves to the inch of the Diamond Disc would give 50% more playing time than a normal needle disc which has 80 grooves; thus a 10" Diamond Disc equals the playing time of a 12" ordinary disc at 80 r.p.m. After the introduction of paper labels, a stroboscope was fitted to the edge of such labels. New Zealand collectors please note that this will be of no assistance to them as this country uses 50 cycles in the electric mains power compared with the U.S.A.'s use of 60 cycles.

THE EDISON DIAMOND DISC



AN EARLY DISC - THE LABEL
BY THE PHOTO ETCHING PROCESS



PROBABLY THE MOST FAMILIAR
DIAMOND DISC LABEL



THE LABEL OF THE LONG
PLAYING 12" RECORD



TYPICAL OF EARLY ADVERTISING
TAKEN FROM "THE EDISON MUSICAL MONTHLY"

Like most other Edison products, Diamond Discs are clearly marked with the inventor's name and signature. Other companies made hill and dale discs to be played on Edison machines; some of the makers' records being so thin that two were required to build up the $\frac{1}{2}$ " height. All were inferior to Edison Discs; the main trouble being that the record surface was not hard enough to withstand the Diamond Disc reproducer. Companies in this category included Aeolian-Vocalion, Gennett, Art tone Series, Par-O-Ket etc.

Most collectors will have discovered by now that Edison Diamond Discs can be reproduced fairly satisfactorily with a stereo reproducer. The first discs were issued in 1912 and they made their appearance in New Zealand in 1913. There were three catalogue listings in this country, B., C. & D., the first list containing records with numbers commencing with 5 and selling at 9/-, the second list containing records with numbers commencing with 80 and selling at 12/- and the third the classical listings 82 and 83 and selling at 15/-.

Like most other types of records which have come and gone during the history of the talking machine, Diamond Discs had their good and bad points. They were hard to break and safer to handle; they usually had a much longer life than the 78 needle type disc because of their hard surface. They were easy to clean and seemed to remain so for a longer period. Being thicker, they were not so inclined to buckle if left in the sun. On the other hand they took up much more storage space and the collector who wished to obtain records of many of the celebrities such as Melba, Caruso, etc. had to look to other labels for such artists as Edison's choice in Music by no means matched the high standard of his inventing.

Like many manufacturers, Edison was badly hit by the restrictions of the First World War, but with his typical reaction to adversity, he was able to overcome his problems. One of the most important ingredients in the production of Diamond Discs was phenol, better known as carbonic acid. With the outbreak of War, Britain required all her limited supplies of this raw material and Edison was faced with the necessity of stopping record production. The most favourable report he received from a chemical manufacturer in the United States was that the production of synthetic phenol would take six months. Edison set to work himself and within eighteen days of building a new plant, was producing half a ton a day. It seems possible that the use of this synthetic material however, accounts for the fact that many of the discs found in New Zealand are of poor playing quality. A large number of them were manufactured during the War years.

To conclude this story of the Edison Diamond Disc, we would like to reproduce an article originally published in the October 1926 Edition of the Edison Musical Monthly which was edited by our Patron, Mr. C.E. Wolegge.

POUNDING THE EDISON DISC WITH A HAMMER CONTINUOUSLY

The Silverstone Music Co., St. Louis, invented a mechanical contrivance, and has displayed it for some time in their show windows. It is a device by which an 8-ounce hammer strikes a suspended disc so as to demonstrate the extraordinary unbreakable qualities of the Edison Diamond Disc.

The hammer, which is fixed on a hinge in a table, is worked automatically by electricity. This hammer strikes 27 times a minute with clock-like precision, or 22,680 times a day of fourteen working hours. The Re-Creation has not been cracked or broken but does show slight abrasions on the surface. The question is, how long will it take to break the Re-Creation. The Re-Creation is swung from the top of the window, and the hammer strikes with such force that the blow can be heard distinctly all over the store.

HOW THE PHONOGRAPH WAS DISCOVERED

In Volume 2 Issue 1 (October 1966) we published two versions of how the Phonograph was discovered. Our Patron, Mr. C.E. Woledge has pointed out to us that so many versions of the discovery were circulated and so many were inaccurate, that the Export Division of Thomas A. Edison Inc. issued an official booklet HOW EDISON INVENTED THE PHONOGRAPH to tell the true story. From the booklet, we quote the official story and the original introduction.

Scarcely a week passes that some country newspaper does not state that Thomas A. Edison's discovery of the Phonograph was prompted by the accidental pricking of his finger by the needle of a telephone diaphragm with which he was experimenting. We shall have to put a quietus on this old newspaper story.

The true story is best told in the inventor's own words and the germ idea of the Phonograph will throw an interesting sidelight on his own account of its subsequent invention.

"I was experimenting," Edison says, "on the automatic method of recording telegraph messages on a disk of paper laid on a revolving platen, exactly the same as the Disc talking machine of to-day. The platen had a spiral groove on its surface, like the Disc. Over this was placed a circular disk of paper; an electromagnet with the embossing point connected to an arm travelling over the disk, and any signals given through the magnet were embossed on the disk of paper. If this disk was removed from the machine and put on a similar, provided with a contact point, the embossed record would cause the signal to be repeated into another wire. The ordinary speed of telegraphic signals is 35 to 40 words a minute, but with this machine several hundred words were possible.

"From my experiments on the telephone I knew of the power of a diaphragm to take up sound vibration, as I had made a little toy, which, when you recited loudly in the funnel, would work a pawl connected to the diaphragm, and this engaging a ratchet-wheel served to give continuous rotation to a pulley. This pulley was connected by a cord to a little paper toy representing a man sawing wood. Hence, if one shouted: 'Mary had a little lamb' etc., the paper man would start sawing wood. I reached the conclusion that if I could record the movements of the diaphragm properly I could cause such record to reproduce the original movement imparted to the diaphragm by the voice, and thus succeed in recording and reproducing the human voice.

Instead of using a disk, I designed a little machine using a cylinder provided with grooves around the surface. Over this was to be placed tinfoil which easily received and recorded the movements of the diaphragm. A sketch was made and the piece work price \$18.00, was marked on the sketch. I was in the habit of marking the price I would pay on each sketch. If the workman lost I would pay his regular wages; if he made more than the wages, he kept it. The workman who got the sketch was John Kruesi. I didn't have much faith that it would work, expecting that I might possibly hear a word or so that would give hope of a idea for the future. Kruesi, when he had nearly finished it, asked what it was for. I told him I was going to record talking, and then have the machine talk back. He thought it was absurd. However it was finished, the foil was put on; I then shouted 'Mary had a little lamb' etc. I adjusted the reproducer and the machine reproduced it perfectly. I was never so taken aback in my life. Everybody was astonished. I was always afraid of things that worked the first time. Long experience proved that there were great drawbacks found generally before they could be made commercial; but here was something there was no doubt of."

The remainder of the booklet deals with the progress of the phonograph, with the improved models, with the outstanding artists who recorded for Edison and advice on selecting a machine.

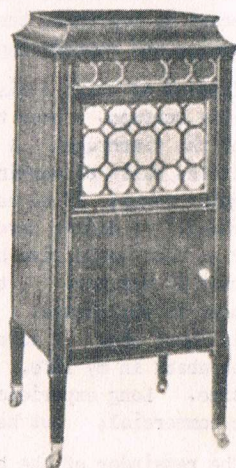


THE RE-CREATION DISC

ANOTHER ILLUSTRATION FROM THE EDISON DEALER'S
CATALOGUE



TWO OF THE
MORE ELABORATE
EDISON DIAMOND
DISC MACHINES



TALKING OF CYLINDERS

A.J.R.

1. Ada Reeve and the Phonograph

On September 25th 1966, there died in London at the age of 92, one of the most popular actresses of the late Victorian and Edwardian era, Ada Reeve.

Although she didn't make any records for Edison so far as I know, she did have an interesting association with the Edison phonograph. It was in 1899 when she was appearing in a musical farce "Great Caesar" at the Comedy Theatre, London. The phonograph was still a novelty and in one scene such a machine was carried in on a pedestal. The audience then heard what they thought was the machine sing this short song:-

"Don't be frightened of me,
I won't harm you:
I'm quite human, so I
Can't alarm you:
I'm as novel as a new potato - ,
Mr. Edison's the perpetrator"

At the end of the song, the pedestal column which was hollow, swung open and out stepped Ada Reeve - to the amazement of the audience who all thought that they had been listening to a real phonograph!

2. "Speaking Frankly"

Readers may remember my March and July 1966 articles in which I wrote of Will Danby and Frank Danby and wondered whether they were both the same person i.e. Peter Dawson. I haven't been able to clear this matter up, in fact the mystery has become even deeper. Besides Frank Danby the singer - who was really Peter Dawson according to Dawson's autobiography - there was also "Frank Danby" a novelist, and a woman at that! She was the mother of Gilbert and Ronald Frankau and sister of Owen Hall (real name James Davis) the writer of "Floradora", "The Gaiety Girl", "The Geisha" and other plays.

This would appear to lend weight to my suggestion that Dawson may have meant to claim "Will Danby" and Frank Strong as his pseudonyms for I think it unlikely that he would have used a name already in use, so to speak.

As I said before, I would be very pleased to hear from anyone who is able to throw any light on this apparent confusion of identities.

BOOK REVIEW - CARUSO ON RECORDS by Aida Favia Artsay Publishers. The Historic Record, Valhalla, N.Y. 10595, U.S.A. Price U.S. \$6.50

This fairly recent publication, which can be purchased only directly from the publishers, is written by a woman who was once a singer herself, but she is probably best known to collectors through her "Historical Records" department in the American magazine "Hobbies".

Although many books have been written about Caruso and his singing, few writers have done much research into the correct playing speeds of the records. Mrs. Favia-Artsay, in the course of her research discovered that some vary from 10 r.p.m. either side of the nominal 78. This could explain why disappointment is expressed by many when they play a Caruso record; they are unknowingly turning him into a bass or a counter tenor.

A strip of music giving a few bars of the selection precedes each review, and the correct playing speed of each record is included. The records are treated chronologically and thus

collectors are able to follow the complete career of one of the talking machine world's most famous artists.

A RECORD OF RECORDS

G.B.E.

Happy Tho' Married a monologue by Fred Duprez
Edison Blue Amberol No. 2373.

This record is typical of the early style of humorous monologue and although the humour is rather "corny" by to-day's standards, anyone with a reasonable sense of humour, should be able to get some good laughs out of it. I do not think it would be an exceptionally difficult cylinder to obtain, as in disc form and coupled with a Joe Hayman dialogue, "Cohen on the Telephone", it became the fourth record ever to sell over a million copies (that was in 1914). The record starts with the words, "The subject of my discourse is; do married men make the best husbands?" and continues with such remarks as "My wife comes from a very aristocrookit family. She has beautiful teeth - yup - all three of them. Her father was a retired bank president; a judge retired him for eight years." Mr. Duprez's voice is extremely clear which adds to the charm of his homespun humour.

Note:- Readers may remember that in our previous issue, "G.B.E." stated that he could not identify the speaker in the Advertising Record. The information has been supplied by Mr. Woledge - the speaker is Ed. Meeker who made many hundreds of announcements for the Edison Company on their cylinders. His clarity made him an ideal choice for this work. Most collectors of cylinder records will have come across those of Sousa's Band. CYMBAL tells us a little of this American who must surely be the first whose name comes to mind when the subject of marches and marching is discussed.

JOHN PHILIP SOUSA 1854-1932

by Cymbal

By the centre quick march - five words that the march king must have used thousands of times in his career as a bandsman and leader as well as a composer of world wide fame. Sousa loved a good story so for a great number of years he allowed several rumours to circulate about the origin of his name; in every case much play was made on the letters U.S.A. being the last three letters of his name. Most of these rumours were the work of his publicity agents. In 1928 he set the matter right in his autobiography "Marching Along", explaining that his father Antonio Sousa was a Portuguese musician who was born in Spain and came to America via England. The Sousa band itself was a large one, having sixty one playing members thus making a large brass band capable of highly efficient instrumentation and playing. This band made many recordings both on cylinder and disc. Amongst the members were several well-known players, Arthur Prior a virtuoso on the trombone, Meredith Wilson of "Music Man" fame on the cornet and Herbert Clarke on the solo cornet.

Very early this century an English magazine devoted to Brass Band music said that Sousa was as much entitled to be called the March King as Strauss the Waltz King. At the time of the Chicago World Fair in 1893 he played his own superb arrangement of the then pop tune After the Ball - it is still popular to-day particularly with handsmen. When the twostep took on in Europe, it was known as the Washington Post because the music used was the famous Sousa composition. Sousa toured New Zealand with his band in 1911. Apart from his touring, Sousa was a busy man, composing over one hundred marches, writing the scores for ten comic Operas and also writing a moderately successful novel entitled The Fifth String.

The origin of the title of some of the marches is interesting:- The Stars and Stripes was written during a period of patriotic nostalgia while Sousa was returning to America after a European tour. The Washington Post was written to honour the newspaper of the same name when a literary contest was held for public school students. The Invincible Eagle March was written in 1902 to commemorate the Pan Pacific Exposition in Buffalo the year before.