



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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Editors:- Walter T. Norris
and Pamela G. Rogers.

Editorial and Secretarial Address:-
73 Flockton Street,
Christchurch. 1.
New Zealand.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

STOP - GO SLOW - AND READ THIS! It was Shakespeare who wrote first of "the seven ages of man". Anyone who has collected anything, realises that in his collecting life he will probably travel through many more than seven ages. By this we mean, his tastes will change - what interests him to-day may not interest him tomorrow; conversely what is brushed aside as of no interest to-day may be pursued avidly tomorrow. Feeling this way, we were therefore most interested to hear a member say that he is getting much more pleasure and help from his back copies of The Phonographic Record than he did when he received them. What we now want to know is this - what will happen to this issue when you finish reading it; will you lose it or will you file it away? It may contain some information which, in three years time, you will urgently require. At the moment we can supply all back issues at 10c an issue (or \$1 a complete volume.) This may not always be so - so we urge you again to hold on to your copies of The Phonographic Record. And the neatest and most satisfactory way of doing this is in the binder made in England, especially to the Society's order. It is in darkish blue with the title lettered down the spine and is available to members for \$N.Z.1.35. (Postage if required, included.) It has a very neat method of allowing the filed copies to lie flat when opened - we recommend it.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE A SPIRAL STAIRCASE WITHOUT USING YOUR HANDS? or in other words, when you are talking to dealers and non-collectors can you describe exactly what you are looking for to add to your collection. This year we tried an experiment - we purchased a small plastic wallet which, having ten transparent leaves, has space for twenty photographs. We've found this most successful and have had much more response to our inquiries. Such a wallet fits easily into a pocket or handbag. If you do not have sufficient photographs of machines, record labels etc. please let the Secretary know - some of our photographer members will be pleased to assist. The wallet itself should be obtainable from your photographic shop, but if you have difficulty, again we suggest you contact the Secretary.

CONGRATULATIONS! - WE HOPE. At the time of writing this, one member, David Longbottom of Christchurch has received his examination results. Congratulations David on another big step towards your Engineering Degree. At least two of our Junior Members are awaiting School Certificate results and by the time this reaches you they will know for better - never for worse. We certainly miss these members from our activities during the latter part of the year, but their concentration on their studies certainly pays dividends. And to all other members - we like to hear what you are doing; we are interested in you as collectors but first and foremost, as people.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE. We draw your attention again to the fact that the Society can supply several replacement parts and can put you in touch with members who are prepared to make other parts for machines

Please do not hesitate to use this service - a note to the Secretary is all that is required.

RAPKE

Another manufacturer who played a part in the early days of the talking machine was a man named Rapke. We know little of him - in fact we would welcome information - but he made two important contributions. He produced a horn crane which was the best available, mainly because of its simple construction. This crane was of such high quality that it eventually wiped out all opposition. Rapke also, in the early 1900's began producing labels containing the number of the cylinder, its title and the artist. These were attached to boxes containing the cylinders and thus it was made easy for the dealer to find any recording. Mr. Woledge tells us that some dealers had boxes made to hold about three cylinders of the one title and by using the labels, it was easy to check the stock of any particular record - in fact he says he virtually could not have managed without them. A close inspection of the illustration "An early phonograph shop in New Zealand" Page 6 of Volume 2 Issue 1, will show these labels and boxes in use. Mr. Woledge has made a gift to the Society of a large number of these original labels and we feature one sheet on our illustrations page.

THE PATHE DISC

by W.T. Norris.

Most collectors of hill and dale discs are pleased at the acquisition of Pathe discs. The type with the etched black label is the most commonly found in New Zealand, but samples of records with a black paper label on which crows a red rooster are not too difficult to acquire. Pathe discs have 90 grooves to the inch and with the exception of the twenty inch record should be played at 90 revolutions per minute. The twenty inch record was recorded to run at from 120 to 130 revolutions per minute. The Pathe Company made records in many places having branches all over Europe. In Genoa, Italy, cylinders were made of the voice of Enrico Caruso by the Anglo-Italian Commerce Co. These are claimed to be the only cylinders he ever recorded. They were later transferred to both single and double sided discs by the Pathe Company. The Company also set up a branch in Shanghai, China. Records issued from here had "The Shanghai Recording Company" on the label which was black with a red rooster. These discs were hill and dale and used the U groove as did all centre start discs. They were different in that they played from the edge to the centre, the same as Neophone and Clarion.

Russell Hunting, a well known figure in the early days of the talking machine, joined the Company and went to New York in 1910. There he set up a recording studio and manufacturing factory with the idea of sweeping the United States with good quality centre-start hill and dale discs. This appears to have been not as successful as was hoped. Like the Edison Company, the Pathe Company finally turned to needle cut lateral type discs. These were called "Actuelle" and are not particularly common in New Zealand.

MORE ABOUT REPRODUCERS

The "hole" story (continued) by W.T. Norris.

According to Gaydon, a man called Hopkins took out a patent for this type of diaphragm. (Patent No. 16602/14). Our illustration shows a machine with no sound box or horn chamber. At the time of its invention, the following claim was made:- "The announcement of a new gramophone which has just been patented by a London inventor, brings to light a new discovery in the simplification of sound producing medium."

The Phonos, as it was called, was a combined diaphragm and horn arrangement; it was in this that the "invention" lies. To demonstrate its capabilities, a cheap phonograph motor was fitted into a soap box and the phonos attachment was added. "The quality of tone and the Volume" it was said "was far better than that of an ordinary type of phonograph costing over \$200". The photograph shows the inventor's "Small soap box Phonograph" - and all for 35/-. (We would be pleased to hear from anyone who owns one of these machines or who has heard one play.) I feel also that there may be other machines similar to this as the cones of such were apparently made from different materials such as paper, celluloid,

thin cardboard, treated silk baliste but the parchment type of paper seemed to be most satisfactory.

Of the machines with an unusual diaphragm, the most commonly found in New Zealand is the Lumiere. I have one of these and when an acoustic record is played, the quality of sound is very pleasing. These rather handsome machines were made in two models, a table type and one on legs, the former being the commoner. The gramophones which were manufactured by H.M.V. in 1923 are apparently rare in the United States but a number have been found in this country. The diaphragm is made by bending a gold paper in $\frac{1}{2}$ " folds similar to the bellows of a concertina. One end is then held and the paper formed into a circular fan. The centre of this is connected to the needle holder at the base of the fan by a small wooden rod. The Frenchman, Lumiere, the inventor, is probably better known for his connection with early films. His signature is pressed into the metal ring of the diaphragm of every such machine made by H.M.V. These machines were being produced about the time of the release of the first electrical recordings; the added volume was inclined to make the needle jump from the groove, thus manufacture of this model soon ceased and the company turned its attention to the marvels of the electrical age.

WANTED TO BUY. Blue Amberol Cylinders, including A recitation by Ernest Davenport or Bransby Williams, "Ave Maria" by Frieda Hempel or Marie Rappold, "Where Is My Wandering Boy Tonight?" "My Old Shako" by Peter Dawson, one by Frank C. Stanley and "Home Sweet Home" or similar - eight cylinders in all. Write to Ernest Hunt, 21 Revans Street, Featherston New Zealand.

BOOK REVIEW. MELBA A Biography by John Hetherington Publishers Faber and Faber, England, 312 pages illustrated. Reviewed by P.G.R.

This is first and foremost a book about an Australian by an Australian. It is also a character study of a woman of strong personality - of courage, arrogance, humour, straight talking and straight thinking, of unexpected kindness. It is also a story of the golden age of opera and what was perhaps the golden age of elegance in England's more recent history - opera first nights were never the same after the first world war. The book has also many stories of other musicians, of the feuds and friendships and particularly of the friendship between Melba and the flautist John Lemmon - which was to last until Melba's death. Mr. Hetherington writes of the affection which Melba had for her close family and friends and of her undying love of her birth country - a love which never stopped her from being critical of Australians if she felt the occasion warranted it. To me this book did more than any other, to change Nellie Melba from a voice to a person. John Hetherington who lives and works in Melbourne has a vigorous style and although this biography is long he does not waste words. The illustrations are interesting and the book a quality production. I liked the ending particularly but I did enjoy the whole book - I think you will too. And if this inspires you to look for and read the previous books written about and by Nellie Melba we list them below for your assistance.

Melba - A Biography by Agnes G. Murphy (1909)

Melodies and Memories by Nellie Melba (1925)

Melba An Unconventional Biography by Percy Colson (1932)

Red Plush and Black Velvet by Joseph Wechsberg (1961)

BETTINI IN NEW ZEALAND.

With the discovery in this country, of the Bettini cylinder of Marcella Sembrich singing VOCI DI PRIMAVERA and the subsequent re-recording of it onto a 45 r.p.m. record (Primo P1001) it brought into prominence the fact that a reasonably large amount of Bettini products had come to New Zealand; much has been unearthed and possibly more may be in the future. Not a great deal is known of this remarkable man although, of course, most books on the early phonograph acknowledge him and his work but although it was a well-known fact that he had recorded the voices of the famous, so little has come to light that little reference has previously been made. It is therefore easy to understand why John Freestone of "The Gramophone" and Aida Favia-Artsay of "Hobbies" magazine hailed the discovery of the Sembrich cylinder with the greatest of enthusiasm and with the renewed interest in Bettini and his works we have uncovered a little of the New Zealand story.

Mr. Woledge, who bought a barrel full of the ordinary size Bettini cylinders says that they had been poor sellers, so much so that all but a few were shaved for recording blanks. With the purchase of these cylinders came a few reproducers and attachments; these were designed to fit all makes of Edison phonographs and most Columbia and Pathe. Fortunately all this material has been preserved and is now in various New Zealand collections. The cylinders all came in plain boxes; each having with it a slip of paper providing the details. The choice of subject matter was fairly ordinary - the Royal Blue Band having quite a large contribution to make. The two Bettini cylinders found at Tophouse Nelson are of the 5" Concert size and are both in very good condition; they are of light brown wax and have a spoken announcement at the beginning. These announcements, unlike the Edison Company, do not state the name of the recording Company. This is most unusual as other companies clearly stated "Edison Bell" or "Sterling" record etc.

The second Concert cylinder discovered was a piccolo solo by Signor Petragorio going only by sound as the record slip is missing. Both cylinders were in the correct blue "Concert" box with the Bettini label. The story of how they came to New Zealand remains a mystery - we can only be thankful that they have survived what must have been a perilous life for any wax cylinder and have added an important chapter to the story of recorded sound in New Zealand.

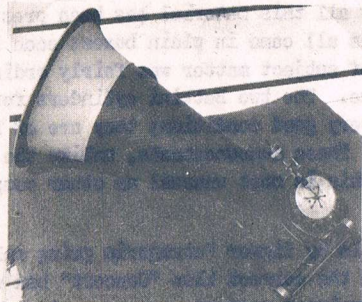
TALKING MACHINE MEMORIES - The Phonograph and Spiritualism by C.E. Woledge.

Rather an odd headline for an item in our magazine, but after a great deal of consideration we have decided to insert it in the belief that it will interest readers because the two subjects, Spiritualism and recorded sounds enter into conjunction in two episodes which actually took place. The belief or otherwise in Spiritualism is open to debate. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, after years of research, gives the following:-

According to our investigations 75% of Spiritualism is fraud and trickery but the other 25% cannot be accounted for and is steeped in mystery. - As writer of this article, I quote this definition from memory and do not claim the exact wording but the percentages are definitely correct. So to start my story which will be in two parts, the latter episode bringing about the climax.

A well-known elderly gentleman was a good prospect for a phonograph outfit so I contacted him and received his permission to install an expensive Edison Cabinet Instrument (an Amberola 75) in his home and to give a demonstration. He lived with his wife and a maid in a large house, almost a mansion, just out of Christchurch. He had a family but all members had drifted away but paid regular visits to the old couple. I delivered the phonograph with a good selection of records and in the evening, made my way to the mansion. The maid directed me into a very large room which was beautifully furnished; the old lady was reclining on a couch. I placed the instrument in what I considered was the best position and was ready to demonstrate when the old gentleman arrived. In the meantime, I glanced round the room and noticed a piano near one corner and against the adjoining wall was a table with a large stack of sheet music on it, also a violin and case with lid open, on the top. The violin was covered with dust; in fact the dust stage had passed and reverted to a layer of fine fluff. Then, looking at the piano I saw that it was in similar condition. The keys could hardly be seen for the dust and a sheet of music on the music rack had half curled up; never before had I seen such a coating of dust on an article. Again I turned to the violin and unconsciously put out my hand to pick it up for a closer inspection when from the old lady came a piercing scream followed by the words "Don't touch that, it is our daughter's violin." The shock I received paralysed me for a moment but I remember wiping the sweat from my forehead and noted that the old man had come into the room and was demanding to know what was going on. The old lady was sprawled on the couch robbing. I endeavoured to explain all that had happened and when the atmosphere had become clearer, I was informed that the violin and piano belonged to their daughter who had died eight years ago in the epidemic of 1918. Since her death, the instruments had never been touched and were considered sacred. Further they claimed that their daughter sang and played to them from the spirit world, their favourite song being "Just A Song At Twilight" also known as "Love's Old Sweet Song".

When the old man told me that he had been a believer and devoted spiritualist nearly



BETTINI. ABOVE LEFT:- REPRODUCER AND HORN

ABOVE RIGHT:- CYLINDER, BOX AND RECORD SLIP

FAR RIGHT:- BOX AND LID.



PATHE
LABELS



all his life I was surprised because he was generally known as one of the boys of the town and could be considered a hard case. However, my one desire was to get out of the house as soon as possible so I decided against any attempt of a demonstration with the phonograph. With this object, I said good-night, but the old man asked me to have a glass of beer with him; it was a sweltering hot evening and I considered the beer a good idea. So we walked on to the verandah which had a sunporch at each end furnished with table and chairs. The maid brought in a tray with two bottles of beer, glasses and a corkscrew; crown tops were not in use at that time. I was told this was special beer which my host had made to order at the brewery. He asked me to officiate and handed me the corkscrew. I held the bottle by the neck with my left hand and screwed in the corkscrew with my right hand, holding the bottle between my knees. A steady pull and "bang" like a bomb when the cork was extracted; the contents of the bottle came out as from a hose right into my face and up all over the front of my clothes giving them a thorough soaking. When I was able to collect my thoughts, I noted that the old man was laughing and the old lady was standing in the doorway also laughing and with a towel in her hand. I walked over to her and secured the towel and commenced to dry myself while both were still laughing. I was speechless and the old lady said, "John will always have his little joke". I think it was fortunate that I was overcome otherwise I might have said or done something I would have regretted. Anyway I could not take any more that night so left for home without a word to them.

The next day I discussed the episode with my chief and it was decided to do or say nothing and wait for a move from the prospect. Of course I was keen to get the sale with the old man's cheque but, had almost given up hope. However, the matter came to a head almost immediately as the old man walked into our store with a parcel of records under his arm. With a brief "good-morning", he said he had come to settle his account. Not a word was said concerning the previous evening and I felt rather uncomfortable so set to work and made out the account. A very nice sale to the amount of over £60 for which he made out the cheque. He then asked if we had a record of "Just a Song At Twilight". Fortunately we had five recordings under this title - two instrumental and one each by Elizabeth Spencer, Frieda Hempel and Marie Rappold. He departed with these records and was to let us know the following day, which he had decided to keep. He kept his promise but returned all the records stating that they were not up to the standard of the spiritual singing of "Just a Song At Twilight" by his daughter.

This final meeting was conducted with very few words and he departed without saying "good-bye" and I did not ever see him again. His family however were good record customers and I believe had taken over the phonograph.

N.B. In our next issue I shall relate another Phonograph - Spiritualism episode which, in a mysterious manner, intermingles with the foregoing and brings about a very mysterious ending.

SINGERS OF THE PAST. - Frank Crumit.

By C.M.

This singer and comedian with the gentle silky voice was born in 1889 and made recordings from 1921 till his death in 1943. Many will know and remember his quaint and humorous style of song, many of which were arrangements of traditional American folk ballads. He began as a vocalist armed with a megaphone according to the custom of those pre-microphone days, with Paul Biese's Orchestra, with which he made many records. These recordings are usually found on American Columbia and are not as easily found as his later His Masters Voice records. Over the years I myself, have gathered together forty of his recordings and no doubt there are still more I have not located. One of his most successful records was "Abdul Abulbul Amir" and on the reverse side "Frankie and Johnnie". On the former we meet Ivan Skavinsky Skaver who does mortal combat with Abdul Abulbul Amir to avenge an insult. Other song triumphs were "I'm Bettin' The Roll On Roamer", "Donald The Dub", "A Gay Caballero", "Song Of The Prune", "Down By The Railroad Track", "Little Brown Jug", "Granny's Old Arm Chair" just to name a few. Many of Frank Crumit's songs were written about the golf course, and usually had very amusing sequences. His rich quiet humour usually charmed the listener and one gets the impression

on hearing him of a true artist at work who can certainly put across a lyric without any apparent effort. It is interesting to note that the only recording he made with anyone else was the following number. HMV EA.885 "Would You Like to Take A Walk" which he sang with Julia Sanderson. For the collector, his recordings are found on His Masters Voice, Decca, Zonophone, Columbia and Victor.

A RECORD OF RECORDS

C.B.E.

I Said Oh! - by George Robey

Edison 2 Minute Wax Record No. 13203.

George Robey, the Prime Minister of Mirth, was one of the most famous music-hall artists of all time and his recordings are to be found on Edison, Columbia and H.M.V. records. (A.J.R. has written an excellent article concerning him in Volume 2 Issue 3 of "The Phonographic Record".) The song is reasonably well recorded, although my copy is rather faint in parts. George Robey announces it himself and when singing, has a piano accompaniment. The words are humorous but it is to a large extent, the expression put into them by the singer which "makes the song."

SOME DON'TS AND A DO.

DON'T leave wax cylinders on a mandrel for any length of time as the temperature change is likely to crack the cylinder.

DON'T leave wax cylinders in the sun or even where they can become heated as this will also cause a crack to appear - usually a large one.

DON'T leave a gramophone or phonograph fully wound for long periods as this will weaken the spring. Let the motor run right down, then give the handle a couple of turns.

DON'T play damaged Blue Amberol cylinders, as there is always a possibility of the diamond in the reproducer being damaged or completely wrenched out.

DON'T be careless in handling Record Storage Books as in some early types, the records slip into the hinge fitting and become damaged.

DON'T leave discs near heat as they will warp.

DON'T Store discs one on top of the other if it can be avoided - store them on end - the pressure is more even and they can be identified more easily.

DON'T leave any sort of recording lying around without cover - it will attract dust.

DON'T forget! - all cylinders and early discs are getting harder to find; some early machines are major rarities. If you are fortunate to acquire them DO look after them - they are part of our heritage.

THAT WAS THE MONTH, THAT WAS.

For the final meeting of 1967 members gathered in Mr. A.H. Wellbourn's private theatroette for a film evening, first some short cartoons and then the feature describing Edison's crowded and hectic boyhood. "Young Tom Edison".

Only one piece of business was raised, those present being asked to approve the purchase of plastic covers for all books in the library.

Finally came Christmas supper, complete with a large cake! Thank you Mr. Wellbourn. for a fine evening.