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THE G&T GAZETTE

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Can you identify the people in this photograph who posed for Wellington Photographer Spencer Digby in 1938? What are they doing on the cover of the G&T GAZETTE? See the rear cover for further clues. The G&T GAZETTE is a peripatetic publication for members of the SCRATCHY RECORD GROUP. The editor welcomes contributions which may be sent to 93 Burma Road, Wellington.4. New Zealand.

SCRATCHY RECORD GROUP

established 1958

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*This evenings programme
is shared between your hosts Bill &
Jill Main in association with Rod
Cornelius of Auckland.
22nd April 1996.*

G&T-MANSHIP

by H.P.COURT editor of *Record News* - The Magazine for Record Collectors
Vo.3 No.3 November 1958, reprinted with minor alterations.

The other day I was listening, with several other people, to a record of Erna Berger in "Madame Butterfly". Someone made the remark that it was spoilt for him by being sung in German, an eminently sane and sensible remark. Then, the man who had been trying to impress everyone with his great expertise, came out with the very flat and forthright statement, "she's too heavy for Butterfly". This brilliant remark promptly stifled any further conversation - what can one say after such a piece of perfect nonsense? However, the "expert" seemed very pleased with the effect his gem had made and must have gone away from the gathering with an even higher estimation of his own knowledge.

Since then I have been brooding over this incident and it has just come to me that the man must have been, probably quite unknowingly, practising the art of G&T-manship which is one of the higher branches of the school of Stephen Potter's *One-up-manship*. The ploy he used is of course, one of the most elementary. The Uncompromising Stand, i.e., stating something which is obviously wrong, in a flat, uncompromising tone as though it were universally recognised as being correct. The usual example in this case is to say that Caruso could not sing and was a baritone anyway, and though this has become a bit hackneyed by now, it can still start some fine arguments.

Now that I have recognised the incident for what it was, I am very bitter about the whole thing. That I should be defeated by a mere beginner with one of the easiest ploys in the field has annoyed me. If he had used the 'Forgotten Tenor or the Soprano' from Blackpool, I could have understood and replied in kind, perhaps Ankers Aweigh or even Back in Hungary but The Uncompromising Stand!

In order to protect my readers from receiving such a damaging defeat to their self-esteem as I suffered, it would be as well to define some of the commoner terms used. In this list you will find most of the common-or-garden ploys used by G&T-men; for once a ploy is understood for what it is and defined in the proper terms, it is much easier to defeat.

The Forgotten Tenor. Mention is made of the wonderful tenor who recorded one item for Berliner back in 1898. The speaker said he heard it once at the home of the singer's son and he will never forget it - "Infinitely better than Caruso."

The Soprano from Blackpool. A useful variation of the above. The usual story is that the speaker heard a recording session of the Soprano from Blackpool and was greatly impressed. When enquiries were made as to why the records were never released it turns out that Melba heard them and refused to allow them to be published

Back in Hungary. This can only be used if one is not of the same nationality as the rest of the company present. "Back in Hungary this singer would not have been allowed to sing Operetta, let alone Opera" is the usual gambit. As there is practically no reply to this, it should only be used in extreme cases

Ankers aweigh. Usually used to disparage the record being played, not the singer. "That's quite good, but the version he recorded for Anker is much to be preferred". One's knowledge of the small labels and other esoterica can then be shown to be very superior.

The Great Injustice. Used in the case when one wants to play some very bad records by some very bad singer. "The recording horn did not do him justice; in the flesh he was wonderful." Can also be used for electrics with "the recording engineer didn't like him". This ploy is best used in conjunction with:

Not Listed in Bauer. The mere fact that a record or artist was Not Listed in Bauer conveys to some people, an aura of incredible value and rarity. And do not forget if a record is rare, it must be good. Of course, the last statement only applies if you own the record, the converse is true if someone else owns it.

Take 2. A further ploy to show your own immense knowledge. Here the record under discussion must be inspected first. If you see on the matrix that it was Take 2, you can then say Take 1 is much to be preferred. The usual thing to say is that though the singer on Take 1 sang off key, argued with the pianist and left out half the second verse, it is much more forward and lifelike. One can even say that the singer himself preferred it thus showing yourself possessed of much inside knowledge. It also shows that you supposedly possess a Rarity.

In Cellar Cool. The supreme summit of the Rarity school. Your records are so rare and valuable that you keep them in a Bank Vault. This is very impressive if used properly; it can also be used to duck awkward questions such as might arise if you use Take 2.

Unpublished Heroes. A good variation of Take 2. To be used if one cannot examine the record being played - the unpublished and earlier (naturally), version is much the better.

The Lovely Label. At the slightest opportunity one must always say that you possess the earlier pressing of the record being played for you. Though your record be worn, scratched and has a piece missing, it must be preferred to a shiny new double sided version. "The voice is unrecognisable....of course, the matrix must have been worn out when they repressed it."

O Mistress Mine. This is used to show your knowledge of any singer under discussion. "Of course you know she was his mistress," or took dope or only sang when she was drunk. It is better if the statement you make is untrue for no-one else will have heard of this failing and, consequently, you will be shown to be an expert.

The Needle. This is, in the strictest sense, for the Hi-Fi man, but it can be used with devastating effect by the G&T-man. The normal gambit is to say that the only way to play old records is by using a thorn needle but if one is being used one can always opt for the diamond stylus. The most devastating ploy I have heard in this field was from the man who maintained that he kept a 1902 gramophone especially for playing his 1902 G&Ts. The awed hush that greeted this remark was a tribute by other G&T-men present that yet another height had been scaled.

The Old Attic. This ploy is used to explain where one "found" the records one owns as, of course, no true G&T-man ever confesses to paying money for his records especially for the rarities that he possesses. The commonest form in which one finds this is the story beginning, "there was this old attic piled high with all sorts of records" and so on. There are many variations of this story but they can easily be identified; junk shops play a big part in the better stories.

The Incredible Buy. An advanced form of The Attic. Here one owns to buying from dealers but enlarges on the incredible bargains one has had from them. "This I found in so-and-so shop in his 50 cent pile," is the usual gambit. If you possess a few prizes with no labels on them this ploy can be used with remarkable effect, especially if one is talking to a dealer.

As I said in the beginning, the above is only a short list of the more generally accepted ploys. The main reason why I have gone into print now is I feel that there has been over-much secrecy in this field of record collecting, so much so that I cannot, at times realise when G&T-manship is at work. Of course, it must be understood that the terms used are those in general use by the Toronto Chapter of Recordsmen - G&T Branch, other chapters might have slightly different nomenclatures. For the sake of students of *One-up-manship* everywhere I implore that the veil of secrecy be lifted, and ask for news and comments from any working G&T-men.

PROGRAMME

- Part one -
BILL MAIN

(some recent additions to our collection)

Frieda Hempel (Soprano) (a)The Bird Song - W.Taubert (b)
The Night Wind - Roland Farley (both with piano accompani-
ment) Edison 82325 - recorded 1922

Jose Mosé Mojica (tenor) Eres Tú - Alfonso Esparaza Oteo
(with orchestra) Edison 80792 - recorded 1924

Celeste Chop-Groenevelt (piano) Nocturne in F Major Op.15
- Chopin Vox 06034 pre-electric recording.

Richard Tauber (tenor) Ay Ay Ay - Perez (with Mischa
Spoliansky piano) Odeon 8302 - recorded in 1926.

Pola Negri (singer) Tango Notturmo - Ich hab an Dich gedacht
(with orchestra conducted by the composer Hans Otto
Bergmann) Odeon 4765 - recorded 1938.

Joe Loss and his band (with vocal by Chick Henderson) Rosita
- Kennedy & Carr Regal Zonophone MR 3230 - recorded
c.1940.

INTERMISSION

Elderly admirer to Mary Garden commenting on her low cut
dress: 'I'm curious to know what keeps your dress up'. Her
rejoinder, 'Your age and my discretion!'

PROGRAMME

- part two -
ROD CORNELIUS

(some recordings from my collection)

Puzzel Plate: Miscellaneous Artists including Burt Sheppard,
a piano solo and a story read by Mr. Morton - Puzzel Plate -
Berliner 9317 Recorded 20th January 1900.

Elvira de Hidalgo (soprano) Malagueña - Pagan (with piano)
Fonotipia 62349 Recorded 1907.

Lily Morris (Soprano) The Old Apple Tree (with orchestra)
Video tape recording from Vitaphone film made at a live per-
formance.

Florencio Constantino (tenor) La donna e mobile -Rigoletto -
Verdi (with orchestra) Edison cylinder B4 recorded 1906.

Florrie Forde (comedian) On the banks of the Rhine - (with
orchestra) Sterling cylinder 160 recorded March 1906.

Mystery item (to be announced on the night).

INTERMISSION

'Madame Alda was born in the land of sheep and sings like
one.' New York critic on her debut at the Metropolitan Opera
in 1908.

PROGRAMME

- Part three -

ROD CORNELIUS

(further recordings from my collection)

Fred Spencer (collector) & **Friends** Excerpt from National Film Unit Pictorial Parade filmed on location in Lorne Street Wellington. Video Tape.

Oscar Natzke (bass) A eh! Guerrieri - L'Ebreo - Appoloni (?) (with piano played by Hubert Greenslade). Private recording made in EMI studios c.1940.

Enric Caruso (tenor) Sei morta nella vita mia - Mario Costa matrix 21774 (with piano Vincenzo Bellezza) released on AGSA.2 recorded 16 April 1918.

Charles Green (tubaphone solo) Parade of the wooden soldiers - Leon Jessel, Zonophone Z 2337 recorded ?

Another mystery item (to be announced on the night).

END OF PROGRAMME

Leo Slezak, the Barvarian tenor was renowned for his humourous 'on stage' asides such as asking 'When was the next swan was due' in *Lohengrin*. He was once upstaged in this department. 'Hast du zur Nacht gebetet, Desdemona?' Slezak asked in the German version of *Otello*. 'Beloved, take my life, but be careful of my corns', came the wisphered request as he set about throttling her.

SOME NOTES ON THIS EVENINGS ARTISTS

Frieda Hempel [1885-1955]: Commenting on how Edison exerted influence on what his artists performed in front of the recording horn, George T. Keating in the *Record Collector* for August 1955 noted that in complying with some outlandish requests to satisfy the 'Wizard of Menlo Park', she apparently managed to get approval to record her favourite encore - Farley's Night Wind (a title which she also recorded for HMV). Summing up her Edisons he says her Mendelssohn's Auf Flugeln des Gesanges (electrically recorded in 1928) was probably the finest version of this song in existence.

We at the G&T Times like Li'l Alabama Coon for intrinsic reasons and have performed it on our 'Concert' phonograph on a number of occasions at these functions, to the apparent enjoyment of all. Doubtless politically incorrect today!

José Mojica [1896-]: Ignored by most of the major chroniclers of music and musicians, Mexican born Mojica can only to boast a one liner in Steane's *Grand Tradition*. Kutsch & Riemens are more respectful and give a pretty good picture of his life which basically saw him make his debut and career in Chicago, at the opera there in 1919. A solitary performance in Europe at the Mexican Embassy in Berlin and a flirtation with films in Hollywood saw him fade from prominence in the 1930s. When his mother died in 1943 he vowed to take religious orders. This he accomplished in Peru only to return to the concert platform for his church in 1954. A lyric tenor, his voice was appreciated for its expressivness and for its richness of shading. In latter years he became totally deaf.

Celeste Chop-Groenvelte: We have been unable to find out anything about this pianist at the G&T Times and can only conclude that by analysing her hyphenated name, she was related in marriage to Max Chop [1866-1929] a German law student who later turned to music with books and compositions. One of the sides of the Vox recording used in tonights programme is by Walter Niemann, a composer who studied with Humperdink. As well he was the editor of various music journals and a critic in Leipzig in the late 1920s.

Florencio Constantino [1869-1920]: For a number of years we have cherished the opening sentence from Julian Morton Moses '*Collectors' guide to American Recordings 1895-1925*' in describing this artist. "A misreading for stifle for style in the discussing of Constantino in a previous publication was no doubt a Freudian slip...". Born in Spain, Constantino's career was centred almost entirely in the Americas. He died in a charity hospital in Mexico City.

Oscar Natzke [1912-1951]: Although Natzke does not make the pages of Kutsch/Reimens 'A concise Biographical Dictionary of Singers', other publications like the 'Record Collector' and Keith Hardwick (The Art of Singing) are quick to make amends. Certainly, on the strength of his recordings, which reviewers at the Gramophone welcomed at the time, he is deserving of a much higher profile. Sadly, there has never been an analytical biography detailing his life and times, thus laying to rest stories and rumours which abound about his career.

Florrie Ford [1876-1940]: Born in Australia, she made her first appearance in Sydney in 1893. Her London debut was in 1897 where she sang at the Pavilion, the Oxford and South London Music Halls. Her songs which set everyone singing included, 'Down at the Old Bull & Bush', 'Has anyone seen Kelly', 'Hold your hand out naughty boy' and 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag'.

Elvira de Hidalgo [1892-]: In recalling Hidalgo's career, Michael Scott praises her native Spanish titles and recommends in particular Cancion Española from *El Principe Carneval*. Describing this record he said, "What sounds like part of the chorus from the local theatre has been brought round to join in the reprise. After some preliminary *Oles* and a couple of *ahems* from de Hidalgo calling everyone to order, they're off! - the effect is quite irresistible". He concluded by adding that all her Spanish recordings display a vivid and infectious personality which is noticeably absent from her standard operatic titles

Fred Spencer (plumber and collector): One of the foundation members of this group, Fred's devotion to Thomas Alva Edison and everything he personified, left a deep impression on all who knew him. His house in Lorne Street, with two 1948 American Mercury cars (one for his plumbing and the other for around town) shared his front garden with a Rolls Royce. On his death in the 1970s, his collection of cylinders and machines was disposed of in a Himatangi Plains auction run by his long time friend and fellow Marxist Karl Sims(?).

Pola Negri (film star) [1894 -] Born in Poland and raised by relatives in Warsaw, Negri made her first film in 1914. After establishing herself in various European film capitals she accepted a contract for Hollywood. This led to a love-hate relationship which saw her return to Germany in the 1930s where after several flops, she made what is considered her best film *Tango Notturmo* -1938. Goebbels didn't like her, and called her 'the Polish Jewess'; but Hitler did and had her Aryan origins proved. At the outbreak of war she joined the Red Cross and returned to America, where the rest of her life was no less interesting with epithets like 'she has eyes like a dark lagoon - wherein men drown', defining her personality, both on and off the screen. Some were more dismissive with lines like as 'all slink and mink'.

'Like a lot of movie queens she had a blind and uncritical admiration of her own genius in the blaze of which her sense of humour evaporated like a dewdrop on a million-watt arc lamp'. [Quotes from David Shipman's *the Great Movie Stars*].

Since the collapse of communism many changes have taken place in Czech society, some positive, others negative. Freedom of movement and expression, are obvious benefits of change. On the other hand, with the newly found freedom, many of the worst aspects of western society flourish - crime, drugs, terrible TV, MacDonalds and Kentucky! From the purely selfish outlook of a record collector, I yearn for the Communist past. Then, there was one well organised second hand record shop where stock changed regularly. Similarly, there were only five second hand book shops. Now, there are several second hand record shops and more than twenty book shops. Unfortunately they are mostly small outlets, under capitalized and owned by enthusiastic amateurs. They depend upon fragile old ladies carrying one or two books or records to them - it would never occur to them to drive to the little old lady to buy quantity.

Also in the past, there were many well stocked shops selling East European LPs, plus a few specialist shops concentrating on Eterna, Muza, Qualition labels etc. It was a pleasure to visit such outlets and I have many gems in my collection purchased in these stores.

Today in Prague there are dozens of small to medium sized shops selling CDs, but they are totally unrewarding unless one collects Early Music or Czech Music. Apart from Destinn and Novotna, Supraphon have not issued any historical material. There are some western CDs available, but very basic titles and artists. In a year I have purchased only three CDs - Prihoda, Lemeshev and a Bartered Bride with Blachut. Compare this to Vienna, where I have purchased countless historical CDs and even new Preiser LPs.

Despite the obstacles, I have still managed to acquire some 1,300 LPs, 78s, CDs and books. That sounds successful, but the bulk of the material has been obtained for an archive in Norway. They wanted basic East European LPs and 78s, so while I pursued this material for them, I found a few choice items for myself. Using Prague as I do for my base, from where I have radiated to other European destinations.

The first piece of treasure was a Drdla Polydor which has subsequently found its way to an American instrumental collector. A fruitful visit to Liberec (formerly Reichenburg in the Südentenland) yielded several G&Ts (Caruso, Tamagno, Sobinov, Boninsegna), Rehkemper, Feurmann and fifty better items for the archive. A quiet period, and then in one of the local shops an album of Fonotopias surfaced. Unfortunately there were 'routine' artists, Parsi-Pettinella, Russ, Bonci, and one super rarity, Navarini doing *Lucrezia Borgia*, one of the best finds of my hunting career!

I was then offered an album of 10" G&Ts by a collector who knew their value. I contacted an Italian collector who was prepared to buy the rarities and came away with Scheidemantel, Saville, Aranyi, Bertram, Behr, Demuth, Slezak and three speech records of Kainz & Sonnenthal. I kept the Aranyi and then contacted a collector who wanted speech records, asking if we could trade. He showed me a pile of vocal discs and I ploughed through some decent but not spectacular items. Suddenly, before my unbelieving eyes, stood Piccaver's rarest record, the Odeon of an aria from Weber's opera *Silvana*, a record I have been searching for for 30 years. I willingly parted with my speech records for the Piccaver. What a moment of pleasure when one archives such a long awaited prize!

I can now turn my attention to the HMV of Urbano's *Puritanti/Don Sebastiano*, only issued in Czechoslovakia. Shellac is undoubtedly, still in my veins and as it seems I have an uncanny ability to uncover records, what better way to enjoy an early retirement.

Dennis will be known to many of our group. Forced into early retirement, he found it to his advantage to move to Europe until he qualifies for the pension. He intends to return to New Zealand about August.



With acknowledgements to SAUL STEINBERG and the ART OF LIVING - Harper 1949
Cover story clue: The boy in the cover photo now leads a successful career as a Harpsichord soloist! The answer will be printed in the next issue of the G&T Times. A free trip to Somes Island for the first correct answer may be collected from platform 24 of the Johnsonville Railway Station!