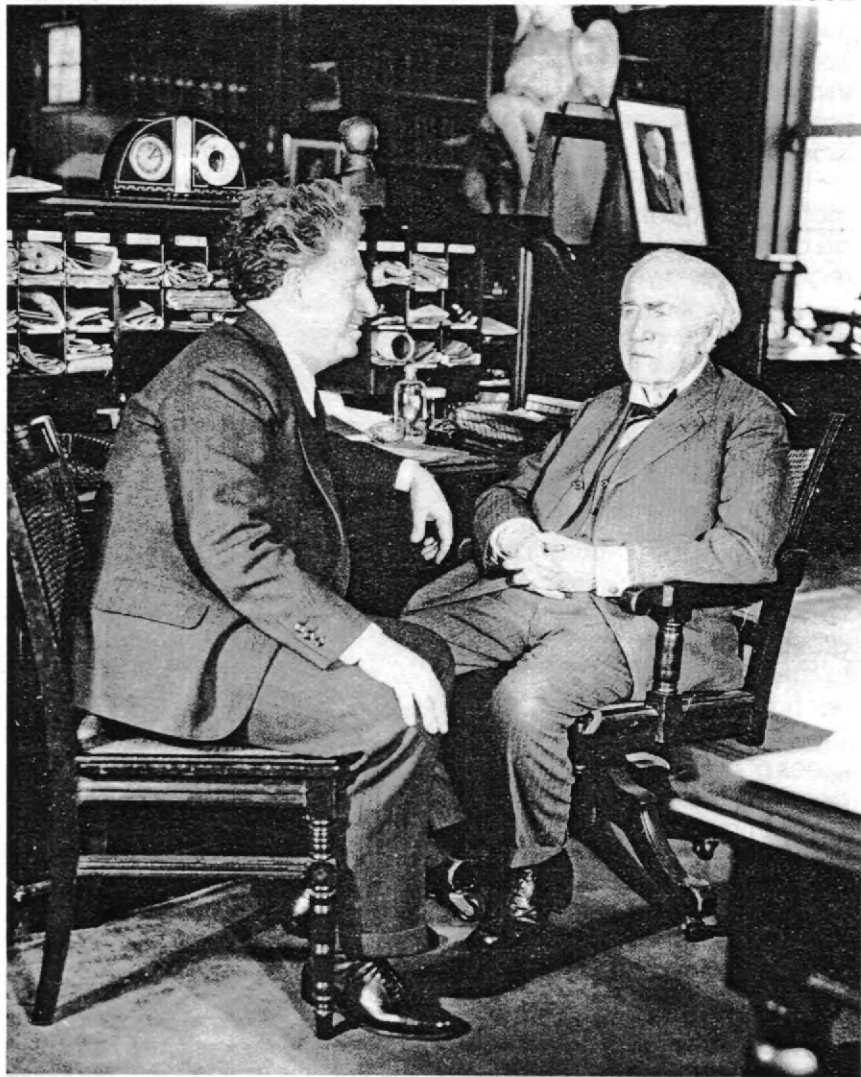


G&T GAZETTE

Established 1995. Now incorporating the *Edison Echo*

FEBRUARY

2002



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EDITORIAL: It's with pleasure we bring you this enlarged version of the *G&T Gazette*, a situation which has been assisted by a number of contributors arising from the ranks of the membership whose articles and illustrations over the last couple of issues have given us fresh hope for the future. We trust this flow of material will continue so we will be able to produce at least four regular issues a year.

Very few in our readership have ever questioned the reason why the *G&T Gazette* exists as an adjunct to the Scratchy Record Group (SRG). We suppose the answer to this question if it were put, is to put on record some of our activities and thoughts for those who will follow in our footsteps. While previously our group has more or less centred its attentions on records from the first half of the 20th century, there are signs that more recent areas of recorded sound are being accommodated into our programmes. This widening of interest leads us to believe that recordings from the 20th century will eventually become a subject in its own right at University level in the study of Social Sciences.

That aside, what do you think of the newly designed masthead on the front page? Those curious to know how we acquired proprietorship of the *Edison*

Echo, will be disappointed to learn that we are restrained from announcing details of the transaction which led to our acquisition of this publication by a confidentiality clause which we entered into with the registrar of Commercial Transactions (literary division). This mythical journal ceased to exist in the minds of Edisonia devotees shortly after the last Gramophone and Phonograph collectors convention in Wellington in the 1960s.

It's our belief that the SRG should plan an extra activity in 2002 to compensate for the way Thomas Edison has been unjustly treated by some music aficionados (see page 7). This would take the form of a special meeting to occur on 12th of August 2002. This would celebrate 125 years of recorded sound. On that day in 1877, Edison uttered his famous phrase "Mary had a little lamb". While we don't exactly envisage our group sitting around listening to Edison's voice on cylinder or disc delivering his "Let us not forget" speech, it would be nice to come up with something which may or may not set to rights a few misconceptions about his place in the history of recorded music. Give it some thought!

Cover illustration: *Giovanni Martinelli and Thomas Edison in a rare publicity photograph taken in mid-1929.*

MY LIFE AND TIMES WITH EDISON'S RECORDINGS

PART 1 by Bill Main

I had been collecting records for a year or so in 1957 when I advertised in the *Evening Post* that I wanted to buy an Edison phonograph. Fred Spencer, a plumber by trade contacted me and offered to help me in my quest by driving me in his car, a 1938 Mercury with a back seat clutter of pipes and gas fittings, to those who replied to my advertisement. After one or two false starts, we finally landed an Edison Fireside phonograph from a house in Melrose. From memory it had a 20 inch black enamel Polygonal horn which was suspended out in front of the machine with a two piece crane. It was fitted with a 'H' reproducer for four minute wax Amberols.

How I enjoyed my find despite the necessity of having to use the same reproducer for two minute cylinders as well as Blue Amberols. That didn't worry me at the time as I hunted around for some of the hard to find Edison operatic cylinders. My first in this direction was an Alessandro Bonci singing *Salve dimora* from Gounod's *Faust*. This turned up in a shed containing spare parts from an old gramo-

phone repairman in Newtown.

From this point on I yearned for a machine that came equipped with a diamond reproducer to play my Blue Amberol cylinders. Frequent visits to Fred's place in the next couple of years, indoctrinated me into the cult of Edisonia. Gradually I became familiar with the dogma and bunkum that surrounded Edison's products. I say this because it soon became obvious to me that Thomas Alva Edison could do no wrong for Fred's generation of collectors who believed everything he represented including his rather weird views on music.

My first Edison Diamond Disc came from a girlfriends house in Christchurch. Oddly enough it was an-

other Bonci this time with *Lucrezia Bori* on the reverse. For a start, I played this on my radiogram and much to my surprise it did emit a sound which was faintly recognisable. By 1958 I'd secured a wind-up machine designed to play this type of recording. This features in the bottom portion of a painting I did which appears on this page. To give you an idea how besotted I was towards record collecting about



Newtown. Oil on Hardboard 1200 x 700 mm. Left hand portion of a 3 part triptich painted in December 1958.

this time, it was one of a series featuring gramophones, phonographs and record labels.

When I look back on these activities I'm amazed that I persisted in collecting Edison's records because it was not easy to get good quality equipment to play

them on. It was of course a different matter if you were content to take cracker barrel ditties belted out with a dodgy reproducer. If this is what you wanted then your expectations could be adjusted accordingly.

Even though Edison invented the concept of recorded sound in 1877, it wasn't until the turn of the century that he began to pay any serious attention to its potential for providing entertainment in the home. Prior to the advent of the 'Gold Moulded Process' in 1901, his records were produced by a very crude method of setting up a row of several phonographs that were connected to the recording horn by rubber tubes.

These in turn actuated diaphragms that were fitted with cutting styli which transferred the sound waves on cylinders made of soft brown wax. This method usually produced half a dozen saleable records from each performance. To get a hundred records for sale, the artist would have to duplicate the item until there were suffi-

cient stocks for listing in a dealers catalogue. On top of this, the length of time it took to play a cylinder with 100 grooves per inch was about 2 minutes which placed serious limitations on the sort of music chosen for recording.

In 1906, Edison made his first serious attempt into providing his customers with an operatic series which like all his subsequent forays into serious music were doomed to failure as Roland Gelatt put it "by a portent of weird mis-casting that was to disfigure the Edison catalogue".

Not daunted by their failure to capture the public's imagination he tried again in 1908 with the first of his Amberol records. These were four minute recordings which had 200 grooves per inch. Even though they were a great improvement on what was previously available, buyers found them rather costly when pitted against discs that had tunes on both sides of a disc

for half the outlay of an Amberol. Despite an extended playing time, the Amberol's hardened wax was still susceptible to wear and was easily broken. By the time he'd improved on this weakness with his celluloid Blue Amberol cylinders in 1912, experiments in his factory were being conducted to see his company enter the disc

market.

Edison's Diamond Discs were released on the market in 1913. To play these you required an Edison Disc Phonograph, which came equipped with a diamond stylus, eliminating the need to replace a steel needle with every playing. The quarter of an inch thick discs with their etched labels minus artists name were not exactly user friendly (see illustration page 16 Top Left). Admittedly while useful information was printed on the record packet along with the artists name, it could cause a problem if it became separated from the record it was meant to protect.

When it came to acquiring a roster of artists for his Diamond Disc Recordings, Edison's agents had worked overtime to make sure there was a sprinkling of international artists on their books as a token gesture towards Victor's illustrious bevy of stars. Recording sessions for his catalogue were held in Europe as well as America. Just when it seemed his new system of recording was ready to make an assault on the European market for quality recordings, the first World War broke out, limiting access to this vast audience of buyers. Oddly enough the Australasian market was considered one of the better zones in the world for marketing Edison products. This was despite the large distances of supply and a War Tax on imports. Despite these restrictions, Edison Diamond Discs and machines were readily available in New Zealand from 1915. In 1929 when Edison closed down all his dealing in phonographs and records, remaining stocks of discs and machines were sold off at job lots. One collector in Christchurch acquired a huge collection of Diamond Discs for as little as three pence each, about a 50th of their retail price for a top of the range recording.

Although the story of Edison's Diamond Discs reads like a series of bad

decisions, there were technological advances thanks to Edison's personal involvement with the recording industry. His Blue Amberol cylinders were superior in every respect to their lateral-cut counterparts when they were first introduced in 1913. But those who thrilled to the marvels of his cylinder phonograph were fast diminishing in numbers. In the end Edison was forced to admit that the future with sound recording lay with discs. And so it was that from mid 1915, all recording work was conducted with Diamond Discs. This did not mean he stopped the production of Blue Amberol cylinders. Ever faithful to this clientele, he continued to supply cylinders dubbed from disc masters until he withdrew completely from the record industry.

While this capitulation from cylinder to disc was a comedown for a man who treasured his invention, Edison remained convinced that his vertical-cut method of recording was superior to his opponents lateral-cut technique. His confidence in this belief found expression in his *Tone Tests* throughout America. These caused considerable interest and debate and gave his company something they could really be proud about (see box on page 15).

Edison persisted with vertical-cut recordings until 1929. His lateral-cut 78s had only been available on dealers shelves for three months before he terminated all involvement with the recording industry.

For those who are tempted by the thought of acquiring a selection of Diamond Discs its easy to play them on a modern turntable which has the correct stylus and modified head. It's another story when it comes to playing his cylinders unless you want to invest in a vintage phonograph with all its mechanical foibles. None the less, it's encouraging to see equipment like the *Archeophone* appearing on the market - albeit for a huge capi-

NUMERICAL CATALOGUE

Because there was so little contemporary information on Edison's achievements in the field of recorded music when I began collecting, I began to compile a numerical catalogue of Edison's Diamond Discs, concentrating on the prefix series of 83000 and 82000 which carried the bulk of his celebrity artists. For this research, I wrote to collectors in New Zealand and all around the world including Bill Moran in California, Carl Brunn in Sweden, Syd Gray in Scotland and John Simpson in Brisbane. Slowly but surely I managed to identify all of his published records in this series including matrix and take number for the 520 records that were issued from 1913 to 1929. I came across this file while preparing this article and was mystified why I never attempted to publish the results. Possibly the appearance of Girard and Barnes publication, *Vertical-Cut Cylinders and Discs* which was published by the British Institute of Recorded Sound in 1964 may have been the reason!

tal outlay through Nauck's in America. If you are prepared to explore *Americana* as personified by the Edison Company you're destined to encounter all sorts of interesting material from their recorded output, the bonus being that they won't cost you as much as some of the more desirable products of other companies.

So it was with fond memories I began to compose my programme knowing full well before I began that I could not hope to do justice to the extensive range of Edison's catalogue.

At first, I thought a lot of collectors would be interested to hear how singers like Zenatello and Destinn sounded on Edison records. While that in itself didn't pose a problem, I thought it wouldn't really serve the attempt to demonstrate the distinct nature of his catalogue. Therefore, my first measure was to eliminate those who made records for other companies. That settled, I began to assemble a programme featuring artists who more or less had exclusive contracts with Edison. It was at this point that I discovered I had more cylinders than discs. All told I have about 150 hill and dale or vertical cut records in my collection on disc and cylinder.

Unfortunately, some years ago I'd thinned all my Diamond Disc holdings drastically. More disturbing was the fact that I'd virtually eliminated Edison artists like Thomas Chalmers, Mario Laurenti, Arthur Middleton and Anna Case from my lists. Fortunately, I was able to make good on this deficiency with a call

to Rod Cornelius. I am grateful to him for filling in these gaps. So what I've ended up with in this introductory programme are recordings from brown wax cylinders to electric Diamond Discs.

But even with these self imposed limitations, I felt uncomfortable with the 20 or so titles chosen for this presentation. Ideally there should be a series of follow up programmes to cover the full extent of Edison's contribution to recorded music in the 20th century. For instance, there should be one on classical music showing the positive aspects of his recorded repertoire (including some very exciting unreleased material on LP). Then there should be one devoted exclusively to cylinders taking into account popular artists from 1901 through to their demise in 1915 when he switched over to disc recording. And finally a programme devoted entirely to his Discs including items made with his experimental horn (over a hundred feet long), Long Playing Records and his final bow - lateral-cut discs if any can be located.

With personalities like Fred Spencer long gone, I'm loath to suggest it would be timely to revive the Edison division of the SRG, let alone positioning myself as its factotum unless there was support from the rank and file. I know there is already a group in existence which meets occasionally to play old acoustic gramophones and phonographs. So perhaps it's not an idle dream!

As they say in the trade - watch this space!



A letterhead intended for Edison dealers bearing a subtle Dinner Music sales pitch!

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT DIAMOND DISCS IN THE 1920s

"PIFFLE - TRITE"

I have been enormously impressed by my first experience with the Edison instrument and the Edison re-creations. My admiration is all the more remarkable because most of the music on the re-creations is piffle, or if not piffle, trite to a degree. The first thing that got me was the piano record by Ferdinand Himmelreich. Oh, Tell me if all those Enduring Young Charms, or, as I prefer to call it, My Lodging is on the Cold Ground (I don't see why Tom Moore should have the credit of the melody), and I have never heard any piano record to touch it for realism. I then tried Claudia Muzio in a couple of arias, and I could not believe it was the same voice I had heard attributed to her on other records. A harp record was astonishing. As for the jazz bands, all the jazz bands I have heard on the gramophone sound like tin kettles by comparison, but what "an expense of spirit in a waste of shame!" as Shakespeare says. I read right through the catalogue of the re-creations and apart from one or two hacks of the recording room I did not find a single record of good music. In other words, there is no future for Edison instruments unless we get good music in addition to well-recorded music. To the recording and reproduction and the amount of music (one-third as much again) on each side of the records no unprejudiced person could give anything but unqualified praise. I should mention, however, that the fly in the ointment in this case is the buzz in the wax, for the scratch, hiss, roar, escape of bath water, rainstorm, call it what you will, is worse than on any other record. I found, however, that by listening in the next room with the door open the scratch was reduced to no more than the H.M.V. scratch, while the quality of the music was thereby greatly improved and the volume in no way diminished. I am, pretty hard bitten now in the way of gramophone improvements, but the jazz bands of the Edison, for out of the records sent us this month more than half are jazz, have amazed me.

Compton McKenzie writing in *The Gramophone* April 1924

n.b. A series of double page advertisement featuring Edison Diamond Disc phonographs appeared in *The Gramophone* beginning January 1924.

"RECORDS PONDEROUS IN PROPORTION"

Meanwhile Edison had been supplying a music loving world to some purpose. He had sold one and a half million phonographs and more than one hundred million cylindrical records. The disc record was, however, becoming a disturbing factor. Those who already had cylinder machines would, no doubt, pin their faith to them and continue to buy the older type of record. Newcomers to the cult, however, desired the latest and to meet this irresistible development, Edison, about 1908, began a series of experiments on a disc, still cut on the hill-and-dale principle to which he has always been wedded. These experiments have now fructified in records somewhat ponderous in proportions but with the saving grace of carrying more music on them than is carried on any other. To play these records a special machine has also been devised, which he has dignified by the name of "Re-Creation," upon the perfecting of which he (Edison) not only spent several years labour but 3,000,000 dollars in cash.

Lindsay Buick in his book *THE ROMANCE OF THE GRAMOPHONE*, Ernest Dawson, Wellington 1927 page 78/9.

Some notes on the artists featuring in the Programme

With acknowledgements to Kutsch & Riemens and other noted sources.

RAPPOLD, MARIE, soprano, b. 1873, London; d. May 12, 1957, Los Angeles. Originally Marie Winterroth. She appeared in children's roles in London at the age of five and later immigrated with her parents to the United States. She studied with Oscar Saenger in New York and made her debut (1905) at the Metropolitan Opera, singing Sulamith in *Die Königin von Saba*. She remained at the Metropolitan until 1909, then went to the Bucharest Opera and concurrently appeared as guest in German opera houses. Her first marriage was to the American physician Julius Rappold; in 1913 she married the tenor Rudolf Berger. She was again engaged at the Metropolitan in 1910 and remained there until 1920. In the 1920s she appeared as guest at the Havana Opera and at the Teatro San Carlo. She was a member of the Chicago Opera (1927-28) and made a concert tour through Europe in 1929. At the end of her life she was a teacher in Los Angeles. She recorded over 50 titles for the Edison Company.

CHALMERS, THOMAS, baritone, b. Oct. 20, 1884, New York; d. Jan. 12, 1966, Greenwich, Conn. He sang originally in a New York church choir, then studied singing with Lombardi in Florence. He made his debut (1911) in Fossombrone as Marcello in *La Bohème*. He then sang in the United States with the Savage Opera Company, the Aborn Opera Company, the Century Opera Company, and the Rabinoff-Boston Company. In 1917 he joined the Metropolitan Opera, making his debut as Valentin in *Faust*. He was very successful there until 1922, when a throat operation put an end to his singing career. Thereafter he became an actor. He recorded over 70 titles for the Edison company.

MIDDLETON, Arthur, bass b. Nov. 28, 1880, Logan, Iowa; d. Feb. 16, 1929, Chicago. Educated at Simpson College. Began singing at sixteen. First lessons with Alexander Emslic and later with Charles R. Adams of Boston. Joined the Metropolitan in 1914, making his first appearance there as the King in *Lohengrin*, Nov. 18, 1914. Gave up opera for the concert stage after several years and appeared in recitals, oratorios and with leading orchestras. He gave concerts in Australia and New Zealand in the company of Paul Althouse, in the 1920s. As well as making over 70 titles for Edison under his own name, he also sang under various pseudonyms like Eduoard Mitterstad for Edison's German catalogue.

LAURENTI, MARIO, baritone, b. 1890, Verona, Italy; d. Mar. 7, 1922, New York City. Originally Luigi Cavadani. He was sent to Germany to study engineering and while he was in Dresden his voice was discovered. He then began to study singing. In 1914 he came to the United States and first sang in the chorus of the Metropolitan Opera. After being brought forward in small roles, he made his solo debut as the Innkeeper in *Manon Lescaut* (1916). He remained at the Metropolitan for six more years, the importance of his roles being constantly increased. He sang as first baritone with the Scotti Opera Company (1920-21). At the Metropolitan he sang the part of Fritz in the first performance there of *Die Tote Stadt* with Maria Jeritza in 1921. His last appearance was on Feb. 20, 1922, at the Metropolitan as Fléville in *Andrea Chenier*. Two weeks later he died of meningitis.

ERROLLE, RALPH, tenor b. September

22, 1888 Chicago, d. 1973. He studied with Hermann Devries in his home town and made his debut in opera in *Fra Diavolo* at the Marlowe Theater, Chicago, on May 3, 1909 with the National Opera Company, with which he subsequently toured the United States. In 1916 he toured Australia in concert, returning to North America for a season (1916-1917) with the itinerant French Opera Company which visited Eastern Canada. He is reported to have returned to Australia in 1920, remaining for a couple of seasons as a principal tenor with the J. C. Williamson Opera Company. Back in the U.S.A., in 1923 he toured with the De Feo Grand Opera Company, which also visited Canada. He was engaged at the Metropolitan for the seasons 1924-26. In the 1930s he was director of the American Institute of Voice and Opera in New Jersey. In May 1942 Errolle returned to Canada to sing in a season of opera organized by Pauline Donalda under the auspices of the Opera Guild of Montreal. This was, quite possibly, his final engagement. Errolle also recorded for Columbia, Gennett and Everlasting records. He died in 1973. Source Michael Bott 1988.

CASE, ANNA, soprano, b. Oct. 29, 1889 Clinton, New Jersey; d. January 7, 1984 New York City. Her teacher was Mme. Ohrstrom Renard in New York. She made her debut (1909) with the Metropolitan Opera ensemble at the New Theater in New York in a small role in *Werther*. At the Metropolitan Opera itself she took small roles until 1913, when she sang the role of the child, Feodor, in the first American production of *Boris Godounov*. In the same year she was greatly admired as Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier* at its American premiere. She remained a member of the Metropolitan Opera until 1915 and sang there again in the 1916-17 and 1919-20 seasons, but then only in the concert

performances regularly given at that time in the opera house. After 1920 she became exclusively a concert soprano, and as such she toured America and Europe, making a tour through Holland in 1925. In 1929 she married the multimillionaire telegraph king Clarence Mackay and withdrew from musical life. Besides Edison she made electric records for Columbia.

POWER, STELLA, b. 1897, Melbourne. She became a protégée of Melba and was known professionally as "The Little Melba". A temporary rupture in the relationship between the two artists occurred when the recently married (much against Melba's wishes) Power was at Royal Albert Hall rehearsing for her debut recital. Melba looked at her and asked if she was to become a mother. How Melba knew is quite unknown, as Power was at the time only two months pregnant. At any rate "The Little Melba" began crying, tearily replying, "That's what I've been trying to tell you". The ever tactless Melba stomped across the stage and shouted to impresario Lionel Powell, "The bloody little fool is going to have a bloody baby"! Melba subsequently continued to help Power in her career development, but with much less enthusiasm. It would seem that Power, despite her remarkable coloratura skill, was not emotionally cut out for the trials and tribulations of the operatic world. She had success as an assisting artist and appeared in various music halls (including a period at the New York Capitol Theater) and on the recital stage. She was a particularly gifted coloratura soprano, but she appeared only once in opera (as Micaela). In later years she returned to Australia where she taught and continued singing into the 1950s. Source Lawrence F. Holdridge 2001

(continued on page 20)

BILL MAIN - Collector

Greetings from Croydon - Spoken Message.
Unnumbered 2 minute Brown Wax Recording.
(recorded in Croydon 1985)

EDISON CONCERT BAND

Merry Wives of Windsor - Overture (Nicolai)
Edison Gold Moulded Record 8108
(recorded 1902 with Spoken announcement)

HARRY CHAMPION - Comedian

Mr Knick Knack (Lock)
Edison Gold Moulded Record 13609
(recorded in London c.1906 with Spoken announcement)

WILL OAKLAND - Counter tenor

Only a Pansy Blossom (Howard) with Orchestra and Chorus
Edison Blue Amberol Record 1778
(recorded c.1910)

PETER DAWSON - Baritone

Maritana - There is a flower that bloometh (Wallace) with Orchestra
Edison Amberol Record 12343
(recorded in London 1911)

GIOVANNI MARTINELLI - Tenor

Tosca - E lucevan le stelle (Puccini) with Orchestra
Edison Diamond Disc 83036
(recorded in London 1912)

DAN BEDDOE - Tenor & **MARGARET KEYES** - Soprano

Il Trovatore - Ai Nostri Monti (Verdi) with orchestra
Edison Blue Amberol Record 28203
(recorded 1914)

THOMAS CHALMERS - Baritone

Carry me back to old Virginny (Bland) with Orchestra and Chorus
Edison Diamond Disc 80055
(recorded 1914)

MARIE RAPPOLD - Soprano & **ALBERT SPALDING** - Violin

Ave Maria (Bach-Gounod)
Edison Diamond Disc 82536
(recorded 1915)

JACQUES URLUS - Tenor

Zauberflöte - Dies Bildniss (Mozart) with Orchestra
Edison Diamond Disc 82260
(recorded 1915)

PROGRAMME

Please arrive 1-30 for a 2pm start on Sunday 24th February

MACK & MILLER

Ching-a ling's Jazz Bazaar
Edison Blue Amberol Record 4074
(recorded c.1916)

RALPH ERROLLE - Tenor

Le Roi d'Ys - Aubade (Lalo) with Orchestra
Edison Blue Amberol Record 29031
(recorded 1917)

ANNA CASE - Soprano

Mireille - Mon coeur ne peut changer (Gounod) with Orchestra
Edison Blue Amberol Record
(recorded 1918)

STELLA POWER - Soprano

I cannot sing the old songs (Claribel) with Orchestra
Edison Diamond Disc 80708
(recorded 1919)

ARTHUR MIDDLETON - Bass

Pale Moon - An Indian Love Song (Frederic Knight Logan)
Edison Diamond Disc 82205
(recorded 1920)

MARIO LAURENTI - Baritone

Nina (Pergolesi) with Orchestra
Edison Blue Amberol Record 29077
(recorded 1920)

CLAUDIA MUZIO - Soprano

Wally - Ebben ne andrò lontano (Catalani) with Orchestra
Edison Diamond Disc 82232
(recorded 1920)

BILLY JONES

Tatina "Puzzels of 1925" (Betal-Mauberg Ronn & Danideff)
Edison Diamond Disc 51525
(recorded 1925)

WILBUR SWEATMAN'S ORCHESTRA

Battleship Kate (Ada Rives & Wilbur C. Sweatman)
Edison Diamond Disc 51438
(recorded 1924)

ALBERT SPALDING - Violin & **ANDRÉ BENOIST** - Piano

Fantaisie-Improptu - Extract (Chopin Op.66) & Roses of Picardy (Wood)
Edison 40 Minute Long Playing Record 30003
(re-recorded 1927)

MY LIFE AND TIMES

One of the contributing factors which made me rather cynical towards Edison's efforts in the field of recorded music was the attitude displayed by knowledgeable and influential writers like Roland Gelatt (see page 4). While his book *The Fabulous Phonograph* cleared away a lot of the mysticism and gobbledegook regarding the inventor of the phonograph, he took to task the low brow music which typified Edison Records. That combined with the task of trying to get phonographs playing properly with their inherent mechanical problems, did tend to take the gloss off my passion for collecting Edisonia.

Another suppressing feature was the *Record Collector* which naturally echoed the dominance of lateral-cut recordings over everything else. When Syd Gray and Cliff Williams did get something published on Edison artists, it was a concession because the vast majority of collectors could not be bothered with this form of recorded music - other than through LPs and CDs.

One book which has played an important role in bringing me back to Edisonia is *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph - A Century in Retrospect* by John & Susan Harvith, printed by the Greenwood Press 1985 (the Wellington Public Library has a copy). The book comprises interviews made with recording artists, both old and new who are asked their reactions to making recordings. It also has an excellently written introduction, which sets out Edison's involvement and views on music and musicians. Amazingly, there

are several artists in the first part of the book who actually made records for Edison. As most of these taped interviews were made around 1977, the centenary of the phonograph's invention, you can imagine how important these interviews become when one is trying to assess Edison's catalogue of recordings.

According to research conducted by the Harvith's, Edison's intense involvement with the world of music and musicians began in 1910-1911, just as his main competitor, the Victor Talking Machine

Company had conducted a massive advertising campaign promoting the *Victrola* and its Red Seal Records of Caruso and other Metropolitan Operatic stars. Recognising the threat this offered to their existence, Edison's associates began experiments with discs behind his back. On discovering these manoeuvres, Edison took control of the experimentation which resulted in the development of the Diamond Disc, with a quarter-inch-thick record which was moulded rather than stamped - a rather time consuming process which hindered production.

Prior to Edison's involvement, his officials had successfully negotiated contracts with a number of artists such as Destinn, Slezak and Bonci to perform for their Amberol cylinders. But on assuming direct control on the Diamond Disc project, Edison proclaimed himself sole arbiter concerning all musical decisions in his company. His view on these matters was detailed in a letter dated 20 November 1911 that he sent to Thomas Graf, managing director of the Edison phono-

graph division in Berlin, which is on file in the Edison Company Archives. In this he stated he'd listened to 3,000 records to get an idea on what to include in his Disc catalogue, eliminating them down to 230 tunes to be put on the new records. He went on to say he was studying foreign records, noting that doubtless they would find many fine voices in places like Vienna, Milan, Berlin etc. but warned Graf that, "I propose to depend upon the quality of the records and not on the reputation of the singers".

He also requested Graf to keep an eye on Hammerstein's European Opera seasons for talent. It seems likely that this instruction led directly to singers like Martinelli and

Labia making records for Edison in London in 1912, but in a footnote he cautioned "I do not intend to pay great sums for exclusive, but prefer to pay good price for say 12 records from their particular repertoire *which we will select*. These will do for list and for advertising purposes and last for two or three years, putting one out now and then".

Before engaging any artist, he insisted on test cylinders in order to get an idea of their voice. This was important to Edison. For instance commenting on Titta Ruffo on a Victor recording he said "...I would not put his voice on our new Disc even if he paid me. His voice is attuned for a large place, like an Opera House, which translated on a phonograph and put in a home gives poor results".

Then again Edison's preferences for music didn't escape attention with serious doubt coming from the prestigious musical magazine *Etude* in 1923 who classified his musical preferences as "...very elementary and primitive in tastes".

Summarising these faults, authors Harvith's commented that Edison gauged

singers and instrumentalists by their tonal characteristics, disregarding reputation and more often than not found fault with excessive vibrato or tremolo rather than interpretation or musicianship.

Singers with international reputations who got the thumbs down by Edison included Enrico Caruso, Geraldine Farrar, Ernestine Schumann Heink, John McCormack, Leo Slezak, Conchita Supervia and Tito Schipa.

When Sergi Rachmaninoff came into the studios to make records in 1920, a sequence of events which are well documented make one marvel that anything got published from these sessions. Edison asked Rachmaninoff

to play in his presence and declared after the first few notes of the C Sharp Minor Prelude, "That's enough. Whoever told you were a piano player? You're a pounder". Despite this put down, subsequent events saw Edison release a number of records by Rachmaninoff which warmed the hearts of Company executives, with sales exceeding expectations. Although Rachmaninoff was subsequently snapped up by Victor, his Edison discs were the only ones to be treasured by his family.

Some explanation concerning the finer points of music and what Edison actually heard might be attributed to his hearing problem. Edison's son Theodore said "My father, being deaf, couldn't hear things the way normal people do". This may explain why his preferences for obsequious accompaniment, consonant harmony and tame pianism probably stemmed from this physical impairment which caused him to hear distortion and interferences which others heard undisturbed.

On a more positive note, Edison's

"The Phonograph is not an Opera House".

Tone Tests, made many people rethink their attitude towards his Diamond Discs.

Like many others, I have been puzzled by these promotional concerts. How did so many people get led into believing the extravagant things his publicists were claiming! To a large degree, I owe my enlightenment to a book called *Edison Diamond Disc Re-Creations - Records and Artists 1910-1929* compiled by Raymond R. Wilie and Edited by Ronald Dethlefsen, APM Press 1985. In here I found what I was looking for. This was a list of special records which were made to accompany singers and instrumentalists on their tone test tours, records that had blank passages for the soloist to allow them to make their contribution on stage. Then I reread the

Harviths' book again, specially the story concerning their origin and popularity spread over a decade beginning in 1915 featuring the soprano Anna Case who was interviewed by the authors in 1972. She referred to her participation in these promotions using her 'copy cat' voice. This is the passage from Harviths book.

HARVITHS: You have been credited with originating the idea of the tone test.

CASE: Oh, yes. I was on a cross-country concert tour. I usually made it a habit whenever I was in a town to go to the Edison Shop and have a little visit with them. So one day I walked into a shop, and they were playing one of my records. When I walked in the door, I started singing with the record and making my voice sound exactly like it ... they asked me to go on a concert tour with the machine. I

gave a recital at Carnegie Hall [March 10, 1920], standing beside the machine, and copied the recorded sound. They didn't know when I was singing and when I wasn't. They couldn't tell by the voice. Of course, they could see my lips go, but by the tone quality, they couldn't tell the difference. And that's what started the saying that it was so like the natural voice that they didn't know when it was the machine and when it was me singing. Of course, if I had sung loud, it would have



been louder than the machine, but I gave my voice the same quality as the machine so they couldn't tell. And then sometimes I would stop singing and let the machine play, and I'd come in again. Well, it seemed to make a tremendous success.

They had wanted me to make concert tours with the machine, whereupon my manager said, "No, you can't do that. You make a concert tour, and you'll sing yourself, and no machine." [Nevertheless, Anna Case did give, 'tone tests in such disparate places as St. Louis and Fargo, North Dakota.]

Moving on from tone tests and the tremendous amount of publicity which they attracted, there is another little known Edison achievement in recorded music.

In 1921, the company published an advertising booklet which attempted to "treat music from an entirely new viewpoint-the viewpoint of *what it will do for you*". It was based upon scientific experiments conducted by a bevy of American Psychologists headed by Dr. W. V. Bingham who was Director of Applied

Psychology at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. The booklet contended that music could be broken down into thirteen different categories from "tender" and "solemn" to "joyous" and "weird". It went on to explain how music could be made to harness this power for the service of man.

Bingham's results were 135 selections recorded on Diamond Discs arranged to constitute a musical medicine chest, making it easy for you to banish unpleasant moods and bring you peace of mind.

Summarising this period in their book, the Harviths said "Edison's use of tone tests and mood music represented but two areas in which he acted as a visionary figure in the history of recorded sound"... "his conscious use of recorded music for the manipulation of emotions was quite farsighted, pointing the way to Muzak and other types of utilitarian piped-in music designed to have an effect on consumers throughout the world".

Despite these achievements in recorded sound, there were a number of impediments to his success in a commercial sense which far outweighed any gains. Diamond Discs could only be played with a special reproducer. His Diamond Disc phonographs were very costly in comparison to lateral machines. There was an un-

favourable reaction to the thickness of his discs as Lindsay Buick pointed out in his book. This coupled with etched labels that left off the name of the artist, didn't endear him to record buyers. Another disadvantage was in his production methods. It took longer to get them on the market which was critical in terms of hits. Finally their was his resistance and delay to switching over to electric recording.

TONE TESTS

An artist stands beside the New Edison Phonograph and sings-or plays. Suddenly, and without warning, the artist ceases and the New Edison continues alone. The test is whether the audience, with eyes closed, can tell when the living artist has ceased to sing-or play. Where practicable, the lights are turned off suddenly and the artist steals from the stage, leaving the New Edison to perform its miraculous feat of Re-Creating the singer's voice-or instrumentalist's performance with such perfect realism that the audience is not aware of the artist's departure until the lights are turned on.

I'll leave the last word to the Harviths.

"Despite his lack of commercial success in the world of recording, Edison remains a visionary thinker on the philosophy and practice of recording, a figure whose views on perfection in recording, the use of recorded music as a palliative, and recorded music as a medium separate from music performed live still have significance".

Footnote: Since writing this, I have received a copy of Marston's *THE EDISON TRIALS - Voice Audition Cylinders of 1912-1913*. This proves that Edison had serious intentions of challenging his competitors by entering into the difficult terrain of serious music. His musical deficiencies in this area plus his paranoid tendencies of refusing to delegate these responsibilities to anyone other than himself, sadly heralded the fate of his recording empire. See page 19 for further details on this release.

BOOK REVIEW

PETER DAWSON - *The World's Most Popular Baritone*, by Russell Smith & Peter Burgis with a complete song title discography. Currency Press - Sydney (Aus.)\$39.95.

This publication has been long in the making and eagerly awaited by record collectors around the world. I'm glad to report the wait has been worth while. At last we have a book that does justice to the life and times of Peter Dawson, a singer whose talents are well known to record collectors and elderly radio listeners between the two world wars. Both authors are well qualified to attempt the task of defining Peter Dawson, the recording artist and concert singer. Russell Smith, singer and academic is one of Australia's foremost bass-buffos, while Peter Burgis would undeniably be Australia's leading discographer and sound archivist. Although they eulogise his association with the recording industry, they are keen to point out that while the energies and time he spent making over a thousand recordings looms large in their sights, it only represents a fraction of his activities in comparison to that as a concert singer. In this context, I was reminded of the old conundrum. "Did the Gramophone make Caruso or did the Gramophone make Caruso". In Dawson's case this book proves that the Gramophone definitely made Dawson, assisting him in by shaping his presentation of songs - a mirror he used to refine his performances for audiences around the British Empire.

This publication is meticulous in its detail, footnoting quotations and opinions which earned Russell Smith a Ph.D in 1997. While I don't think Dawson the raconteur would have approved of all these irritating corrections to his autobiography, it does pin down a number of anomalies which have crept into legend. For instance as a New Zealander, I'm glad to read that I can now disregard Dawson's claims that a Maori Chorus turned up drunk for a recording session of *Wiata Poi* after a liquid lunch (page 155). The choir in question was the BBC Male Voice Quartet!

One thing I learned from this book, was the tenacious attention Dawson gave to contracts he negotiated with recording companies, impresarios and broadcasting authorities, defending his right for what he thought was a fair price for his services. This gives a completely different picture from the easy going personality we have come to accept as a result of his autobiography. I also gained considerable enlightenment from some of the statistics where Dawson's output of recordings was measured against other luminaries on the HMV label. This certainly gives credence to the books sub-title 'The World's Most Popular Baritone'. But in the same breath I can't help bemoaning the omission of things like why Dawson went to Paris in 1924 to record a 59 second excerpt from Richard Strauss's *Salome*. Surely this must be an exceptional event in his career to have had Smith's attention.

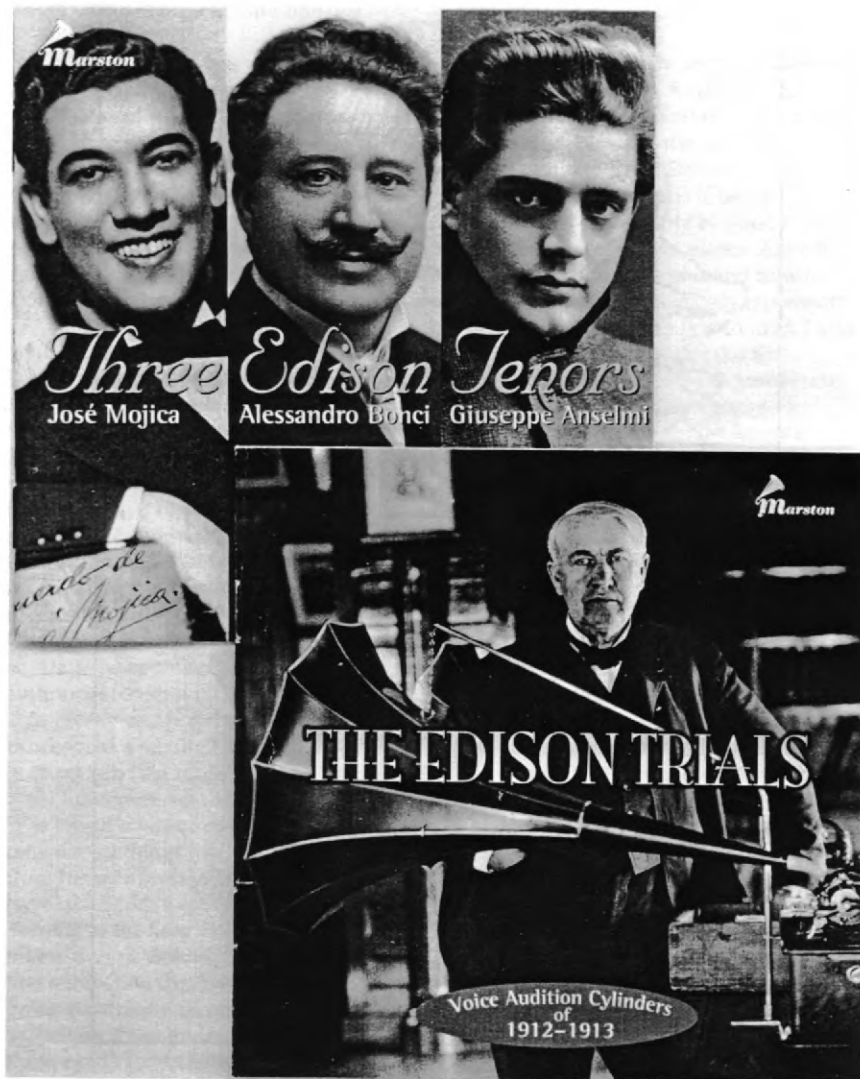
Turning to the *Song Title Discography*. A problem I had with this lay with the way excerpts from Operas, Shows and Song Cycles were presented. A more generous one line redirection treatment in the discography would have been helpful. To highlight my point, how many record collectors who have James's *Australian Bush Songs* know how to look for them under their individual titles! In this case, Peter Burgis relents and gives them a redirection listing, but not so to *Carmen*, *Mikado* or Stanford's *Songs of the Sea*! Despite the lack of matrix and take numbers, Peter Burgis's discography is a tremendous achievement. I suppose in time others will use this exceptionally useful compilation as a stepping stone in formulating a definitive discography, a job which continually evolves in its complexities as countless CD reissues appear on the market, rejuvenating an interest in Peter Dawson's recorded repertoire for future generations.

I place on record my appreciation to Des Wilson who proof read this issue up to page 16.Ed.

I HOPE TO HAVE COPIES OF THIS FOR SALE TO SRG MEMBERS BEFORE LONG.



Caricature by Kerwin Maergrath used for a Good Companions Society dinner, Adelaide 1931.



MARVELLOUS MARSTON!

For those who are interested to discover for themselves just some of the wealth of material which Edison issued either on cylinder or disc, there could be no better way to start than with both the CD's pictured on the opposite page.

I availed myself of these shortly before Christmas and have thoroughly enjoyed the contents. The Three tenors was being offered on special price of \$8 when I sent my order (by e-mail <info@marstonrecords.com>) while the two disc Edison Trials was being marketed for \$32. The CDs arrived within five days of my order being placed and came to \$116.86 including airmail postage. No better Christmas present came my way.

Besides these gems which warm the cockles of any Edison lover's heart, you may wish to spend some time examining Marston entire catalogue on <www.marstonrecords.com> where you will also encounter another notable Edison recording artist in the form of Jacques Urlus.

While I am familiar with the three tenors through owing a selection of their original Edison Diamond Discs, it's wonderful to have them in this format. On the other hand, I will never be able to boast anything approaching the Edison Trial recordings. These are simply amazing from several points of view. The first of these being that they survived and secondly that having been found, the National Park Service allowed them to be copied and published by America's foremost company dedicated to preserving great performances of the past in the form of Marston records. Supervising all this was Lawrence Holdridge who was directly responsible for the magnificent 36 page booklet which comes with these discs.

Let me quote a few paragraphs of the introduction which will give you the flavour of the find.

Bill Main

What the trial cylinders contain are musical snippets by a host of European singers active in the 1912-13 period, some well known and others forgotten. Many of the recordings are simply of arpeggios (which are almost consistently identified as scales) and others are portions of arias or, in a few cases, songs. These were often abruptly terminated before the conclusion of the excerpt or else were begun at some spot other than the normal starting point. For reference purposes, the arias included on this CD are identified with the familiar beginning text, even if the selection is incomplete.

In many of the canisters are paper slips with a bit or two of basic information, such as the singer's last name (not always spelled correctly) and occasionally a word or so front the title. In a few instances, written identification was completely missing. Fortunately, all the selections recorded in Italy (most in the summer of 1912) and most originating in Germany, and France bear the artist's last name in a spoken announcement.

The cylinders were remarkably well preserved been housed in metal canisters with the tops sealed and cushioned with protective padding. The containers still bear traces of coal dust, a reminder of their years of basement storage, and some are dented, which could have been a result of their original transatlantic crossing. Despite their fragile composition, however, few of the cylinders were broken or otherwise damaged.

Some of the Edison label types in the programme



Top left: This etched label was in production from late 1913 until mid 1914. **Top right:** This label was introduced in between February and April 1921 (depending on the series). It was discontinued with the advent of paper labels in June and July of the same year. **Bottom left:** This paper label design was used from October 1926 until the end of production in 1929. **Bottom right:** The Edison Long Playing label which appeared in 1926.



(continued from page 11)

MUZIO, CLAUDIA, soprano, b. Feb. 7, 1889, Pavia, Italy; d. May 24, 1936, Rome. Her father worked as a régisseur at Covent Garden and at the Metropolitan Opera. Claudia Muzio studied with Signora Casloni in Turin. In 1911 she made her debut in Arezzo as the heroine in *Manon Lescaut*, and in 1912 she had a brilliant success in the same role at the Teatro dal Verme. She was greatly admired in the 1913-14 season at La Scala as Desdemona in *Otello* and as Fiora in *L'Amore dei Tre Re*. She sang brilliantly in a guest season at Covent Garden in 1914. In 1916 she was engaged by the Metropolitan Opera, making her debut as Tosca, and she remained one of the leading sopranos there until 1921. During this time she completed guest appearances at the Teatro Colón as well as at the Opera in Havana and Rio de Janeiro. In 1926 she returned to Italy, where she went from one triumph to another at the leading opera houses. In 1934 she was again engaged at the Metropolitan, but sang only Violetta in *La Traviata* and Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. In February 1934, she created the title role in Rome in *Cecilia*. She undertook a South American tour in 1935-36, but fell ill in the spring of 1936. The interpretations of this artist were unforgettable experiences through her uncommon skill of expression, through the psychological depths of her understanding of her roles, and the sumptuous musicality of her presentations. Because of her eminence in the art of acting she was called "The Duse of opera".