

G&T GAZETTE

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Caption Front Cover: Fred Spencer with his Opera Phonograph. Photo by Wally Golledge early 1960s.

Captions Back Cover: Top left, a thinner version of your editor in 1959/60 admiring a 78 rpm recording from his collection at Kenwyn Terrace, Newtown. Top right, Michael Woolf reacting to my acquisition of an Edison Concert Phonograph, Belfast April 1964. Below, head of Charlie Lindsay superimposed on a photo of Thomas Alva Edison taken after intensive work on the improved phonograph 16th June 1888. Photomontage by Frank O'Leary - Dominion Museum.

THE FOUR GENERATIONS OF VOCAL RECORDINGS
FROM 1900 TO 2000 IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUALS WHO
HAVE INFLUENCED COLLECTORS
AND WHAT THEY COLLECT

The periods are . . .

1900 - 1925 An age which was dominated by two different methods of acoustic recording, namely lateral and vertical cut sound systems. This period is denoted by the pioneering efforts of people like Fred Gaisberg. In my opinion these years should be dedicated to that controversial character P. G. Hurst.

1925 - 1950 With the advent of electrical recording, many vocal collectors had the opportunity to contemplate the past as well as the present. Some stayed with the so called "Golden Age" of singing while others luxuriated a broader range of frequencies. I dedicate this period to John Freestone.

1950 - 1980 While Long Playing records didn't add much to the quality of sound, it was a period when recording companies who had a vested interest in their past, did much to keep alive an interest in singing from a former generation. My personality of this generation is Desmond Shaw-Taylor.

1980 -2000 As LPs gave way to CDs an increasing number of compilations were released with unpublished material from the vaults. Companies also began to pay greater attention to the way they transcribed sound from old masters. This period in my opinion belongs to Ward Marston.

WHAT WOULD YOUR CHOICE BE?

APPROACHING 50 YEARS OF RECORD COLLECTING by Bill Main
This article is respectfully dedicated to some of New Zealand's first generation record collectors who had a significant influence on me as I established my collection. They were, Fred Spencer Jack Henderson and Charlie Lindsay.

When I attempt to look back on what started me collecting records, I see a striking similarity with a question which I have put to photographers when I worked at the NZ Centre for Photography. Do you count your first amateur attempts with a box camera as your beginnings or do you nominate your first serious essay into the craft as a starting point?

In this context does my purchase of a plum label HMV Australian pressing of "Leave the dishes in the sink, Ma" by Spike Jones as a third former in 1948 qualify as a legitimate starting point? Or should I signify something more substantial such as when I purchased my first copy of "The Gramophone" which I can date as mid 1954 (it was the March issue).

If this commitment is acceptable, I would like to list some of the things which stand out in my mind with the hope it will stimulate others into ransacking their memories and bursting into print.

IN THE BEGINNING

There were a series of things which put me on track for venturing into this life long interest. All occurred in the early 1950s. They were things like attending concerts by the National Orchestra and taking a leading role in my college's musical, Edward German's "Merrie England". Then there were films like "The Great Caruso" and "Tonight We Sing", with stunning performances by Mario Lanza and Ezio Pinza.

On top of these I attended Canterbury University 1953-1955 to do a Fine Arts Course. Here I met up with a group of students who were excited over the arrival of long playing recordings on the market and how they promoted the enjoyment of music. At a coffee break in the Student Union Building, my friend, Nelson Kenny mentioned that Beggs in Christchurch were having a deletion sale of 78s. Knowing how I was interested in the Russian bass Chaliapine as portrayed by Ezio Pinza in "Tonight we Sing", he said he'd seen an HMV of him at the sale reduced from 8/6 to 3/-. This was DB 1437 containing the two *Faust* arias *Le veau d'or* and *Vous qui faites l'endormie*. I quickly hopped on my bike and bought the record. This was in 1955.

Unlike most of my fellow students who were as poor as church mice, I was comfortably off having worked full time for a year in a dry cleaning factory prior to starting the three year course that would give me a ticket for teaching. This allowed me to buy a table top radiogram for my digs in an Annie Clifford house just off Papanui Road. My radiogram (I think it was called a *Pacific*) had a BSR turntable that played 78s, 45s and 33^{1/3} rpm recordings. Together with my girlfriend, we'd listen to records I'd bought. These purchases were largely dominated by records from the Decca catalogue. I suspect I was drawn to this company's products over others because of the colourful covers they

employed over the standard HMV and Columbia format which were repetitive and boring. Then again with conductors like Kleiber and the Concertgebouw Orchestra attracting wonderful reviews in *The Gramophone*, it wasn't always the visual impact of the record cover that drew me to Decca. For instance Solomon's visit to NZ in 1954 saw me get some of his records as well as Julius Katchen whom I admired greatly having attended his concerts in Wellington and Christchurch.

But apart from the solitary deviation to get Chaliapine's Faust arias, I suppose I could not claim to be a died-in-the-wool record collector at this stage of my life.

Having left Christchurch for a year's study in Auckland to do the Post-Graduate Teachers Course at Auckland Teachers' Training College, I met up with another art student who collected records.

Roger Hart and I shared a house in Richborne Street, Kingsland and while I had to put my radiogram into storage because I didn't know where I might end up getting a job as a teacher, I did not suffer from a lack of recorded music. Roger had a sound system which consisted of a turntable, speakers and amplifier which completely refocused my appreciation of recordings. From his equipment I heard all sorts of music from Burl Ives to Vaughn Williams. On top of his musical preferences which centred on vocal music I went off and bought discs of my own which he allowed me to play on his hi-fi. This period saw me venture into buying LP vocal recordings for the first time. Fischer-Dieskau (Brahms) and Piere Bernac (Poulenc & Ravel) were two LPs which I still have in my collection. Also that year in Auckland - 1956 - I heard Victoria de Los Angeles in the town Hall and was zapped when she brought out her guitar for a bracket of encores. My other less distinguished contribution to music in a house which was shared by three others beside Roger and myself was when we gave parties. Invariably Roger would call upon me to produce a 78 I'd acquired from somewhere which brought noisy endorsement whenever we played it. It was Alexander's Ragtime Band, a Columbia 10 inch discs played by Ted Lewis and his band.

If nothing else, my year in Richborne Street underlined the need for a hi-fi unit. So I put in train a commission for an amplifier and speaker from my neighbourhood record dealer in Newtown. While it only had minimal power, it certainly put to shame my Pacific with its tiny 6 inch elliptical speaker.

A BROADENING EXPERIENCE

During my year of learning to become a teacher, I had to do two week "sections" in Auckland and another that was called a home "section". Although I was a Wellingtonian, I was able to wangle a posting to Christ's College which allowed me to catch up with my art school friends including Nelson who had married Janet Stevens, a mezzo-soprano who featured in the *G&T Gazette* (Vol 5 #3) with an article on Tom Burke. During this short stay and subsequent visits to Christchurch I became familiar with Nelson's source of obtaining 78s from a shop in Cashel Street which I think was called Bain's Record Room for Rare Recordings.

Bain who originally ran a suburban lending library, discovered he could make more money trading in records and before long had moved premises to the CBD and advertised his stock of 78s on a weekly basis every Friday morning. Nelson it seemed had a sixth sense when it came to important record sales and would be waiting on Bain's doorstep on

a Friday morning having come more or less, straight from his evening shift as a copy writer at the *Christchurch Press*. Later Bain went onto trade in Christchurch for a number of years importing records to order.

At the end of 1956 I'd obtained a teaching position at the Wellington Technical College, and once I was settled in I began enlarging my holdings of 78 rpm vocal recordings by making it known to my friends and associates that I was interested in their unwanted 78s. I also advertised regularly in the *Evening Post*, and haunted the second hand shops in Wellington. My first foray was to Molesworth Street where Travis & Co. had a series of shops that dealt in everything from clothing to furniture. On the day I set out to do this, my route was obstructed by crowds attracted to the collapse of the scaffolding outside the DIC on Lambton Quay which had been erected to support the covered walkway over the pavement. Somehow I managed to force my way through thick crowds lining the pavement to Travis's. My one and only find of the day was a single sided Columbia recording of Dame Clara Butt singing the Holy City!

A few weeks later I was delegated to look after girls' cricket during our college's sports afternoon at Newtown Park. Walking back to where I lived in my parent house, I called in upon Travis's Newtown shop in Rintoul Street. Here in a floor model gramophone I found my first pale green HMV DM105 Caruso and Scotti *Forza & Bohème* duets. My feet hardly touch the ground as I walked home! This was in 1957.

THE WAYS AND MEANS OF GETTING A COLLECTION TOGETHER

Flushed with these successes I began a classified advertisement campaign. These led me to make contact with Ray Bresanello a teacher who lived in Wainuiomata. A visit to him meant a tram, rail & bus journey but all this was worth while when I landed a Zenatello Fonotopia from him, my first of this treasured company's products.

Also about this time I received parcels of books and magazines which I'd ordered from England and America which extended my knowledge of collecting vocal recordings. Moses *Collectors' Guide to American Recordings 1895-1925*, Boris Semeonoff's *Record Collecting*, P.G.Hurst's *The Golden Age Recorded*, Roberto Bauer's *Historical Records* and the first issues of *Voices from the Past*. And of course as many back issues of the *Record Collector* that could be obtained at that time. As well I continued taking *The Gramophone*.

Sensing there were others like me in Wellington who had an interest in recordings from the past, I advertised in the Personal Columns of the *Evening Post* in 1958, seeking to make their acquaintance. The circumstances surrounding this move remain vivid in my mind. At that time, Personal Classified Advertisements had to be vetted by someone more senior than those on duty at the counter. Although I've lost the original advertisement the wording was something along the lines of "Those interested in listening to historic recordings from the past are invited to telephone 86-742 with a view to establishing an informal group." The girl took my form and disappeared behind the counter to reappear with a round faced bespectacled gentleman whom I later got to know very well. His name was John Simpson, an amateur tenor whom I learnt was besotted with Ninon Vallin and John McCormack. John asked me a few cursory questions and then endorsed my form. To my surprise he also lived locally in Newtown and attended the first gathering.

A week or two later, a group of several people met in my flat above my parent's home in

Kenwyn Terrace. Ray Hedges, John Simpson, Alan Sadd and a woman called Inga Kahn made up the first gathering. There may have been one or two others that I can't recall - perhaps Ray Bresanello - but I can't be sure. It was agreed we would meet again in the new year and this launched what was eventually to become known as the Scratchy Record Group.

Flushed with success in the classified columns of the *Evening Post*, I then floated a series of advertisements for an Edison phonograph. This brought me into contact with Fred Spencer, a plumber and Charlie Lindsay, taxidermist at the Dominion Museum. Charlie was to play an important role in staging the first Phonograph and Record Collectors conferences at Buckle Street in 1963. This was a great occasion and really cemented my desire to collect records and authentic machines to play them on.

However not all collectors I contacted in 1958 wanted to be a part of our group for reasons best known to themselves but were helpful in a private capacity. Brian Salkeld and Jack Henderson, two first generation collectors resisted joining our informal sessions but Jack was instrumental in getting access to HMV's warehouse in Wakefield Street as the dumping of 78s onto the market continued with wild abandon. He did this through the firms he worked for that had electrical appliance departments like L. V. Martin and Newbolds. His task was to ascertain if any of the No.2 Historical Series were concealed in corners of their warehouse. For a time Jack was the travelling salesman for DGG in the lower part of New Zealand and was very knowledgeable in all areas of the recording industry. It was through him I met John Gray. Jack's favourite singer was Rosa Ponselle. By 1958 I had extended my search for recordings by corresponding with various collectors overseas, offering trade and exchanges. Boris Semeonoff in Edinburgh, Bill Moran in California and Syd Gray in England helped me considerably to lay my hands on material which I had difficulty in locating locally. When I look back on these activities I'm amazed at my gall in approaching such individuals with what seemed to me paltry offerings. But as I worked away at shipping records across the world, I could see that there was satisfaction with the two way exchange. For instance Boris was very keen on Stracciari and I had no problem finding him purple Columbias which were American recordings that had been released in Australasia. He also had a liking for the pianists Levitski and Godowsky. Bill Moran's requests were centred on American singers like Dusolina Giannini whose Australian tour produced some hard to find Victor titles on HMV (Australian) pressings.

DOING DISCOGRAPHIES

As a result of these contacts and their encouragement I embarked on the time consuming task of compiling company discographies. For a start I began to make numerical lists of all the Edison celebrity cylinders with a 28000 or 29000 prefix. I later extended this research to his diamond discs which were catalogued under the 82000 and 83000 series. As a lead up to this work I'd made it a habit of going through my collection for matrix and take numbers whenever a new edition of "Voices of the Past" came my way. These additions and occasional corrections I forwarded to J. R. Bennett who initiated the series. At Bill Moran's suggestion, I began to list all the Australian celebrity recordings which appeared on the HMV ED & EC labels as well as the Columbia equivalents on the 03000 and 04000 series, later the LO & LOX series. These I wrote up in exercise books which I never got around to typing out. When Bill Moran passed through New Zealand on oil

PROGRAMME - ROGER HART **16 MARCH 2003**

EARLY SINGERS SING EARLY MUSIC

John Coates	It was a lover and his lass (Thomas Morley 1557-1603)
Charles Gilibert	Plaisir d'amour (Martini 1741-1815)
Enrico Caruso	Bois épais - <i>Amadis</i> (Lully 1639-1687)
Reinald Werrenrath	Come raggio di sol (Caldara 1670-1736)
Alma Gluck	Rossignols amoureux <i>Hippolyte et Aricie</i> (Rameau 1683-1764)
Maartje Offers	Caro mio ben (Giordano 1743-1798)
Ezio Pinza	Lungi dal caro bene (Sarti 1729 - 1802)

ENDANGERED SPECIES - THE CONTRALTO VOICE

Edith Clegg	Ave Maria (Schubert)
Ernestine Schumann-Heink	Weihnachten (Humperdinck)
Louise Homer	Ai nostri monti <i>Il Trovatore</i> (Verdi) with Caruso
Margaret Balfour	Softly and Gently <i>Dream of Gerontius</i> (Elgar) with Tudor Davies - Live Recording.
Kerstin Thorborg	Branganes Warning <i>Tristan und Isolde</i> (Wagner)
Marion Anderson	I can't stay away (Negro Spiritual)
Kathleen Ferrier	Spring is coming <i>Otho</i> (Handel)

THREE VA VB ARCHIVE SERIES

Mattia Battistini	Deh vieni alla finestra <i>Don Giovanni</i> (Mozart)
Pol Plancon	Vous quis faites - Serenade <i>Faust</i> (Gounod)
Titta Ruffo	Tu sola a me rimani <i>Chatterton</i> (Leoncavallo)

THREE JOHN McCORMACK IRISH PRESSINGS

Del tempio al limitar <i>Pearlfishers</i> (Bizet) with Sammarco.
The Moon has raised her lamp above <i>Lily of Killarney</i> (Benedict) with Werrenrath.
The Old House (O'Connor).

2pm 23 Shannon Street, Mt. Victoria.

Some biographical notes on the singers

EARLY SINGERS

John Coates (1865 - 1941)

Began as a baritone, emerged as a tenor in light opera and developed into a heldentenor capable of tinging Tristan and Siegfried. Also renowned as a concert and oratorio singer - was Elgar's preferred Gerontius in his oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Charles Gilibert (1866 - 1910)

Possessor of a small high baritone that restricted him on the operatic stage to character parts, yet who as a master of French vocal art, was admired and respected by the greatest stars of his day.

Enrico Caruso (1873 - 1921)

The finest Italian tenor of his time.

Reinald Werrenrath (1883- 1953)

American concert and oratorio baritone, sang occasionally at the Met. also in England and Europe. Made several recordings of Italian aria antiche.

Alma Gluck (1884 - 1938)

Born in Rumania, came to America as a child, Sang three seasons at the Met. with limited success, left in 1912 and spent two years studying with Marcella Sembrich, re-emerging as a concert and later a highly successful recording artist. Her recording of *Carry me back to old Virginia* sold over a million copies.

Maartje Offers (1892 - 1944)

Dutch contralto. Studied in Holland and debuted there in 1910. Sang in 1924/25 at La Scala Ring Cycle conducted by Toscanini, and made a successful concert tour of Australia in 1926. Concert and oratoria singer.

Ezio Pinza (1892 - 1957)

The finest Italian bass of the inter-war years, his career being centred mainly on the N.Y. Met. 1926-48. After leaving the Met. he made a career in films and musicals.

CONTRALTOS

Edith Clegg

Sang major contralto and mezzo roles at C. G. at both English and International seasons, where she was often Suzuki to Emmy Destinn's Madame Butterfly. Later sang with the B.N.O.C. She mixed opera with oratorio and concert performances.

Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1861 - 1936)

One of the greatest singers. Suffered much early hardship. Sang in the principal opera

houses of Germany, C.G. 1892, and the Met. 1899 eventually settling in the U.S. where she came to occupy a position rather like Dame Clara Butt in England, only motherhood (she had seven children) rather than Empire being the prevailing theme.

Louise Homer (1871 - 1947)

After study in Europe returned to the U.S. and became leading contralto at the Met. 1900-19, Chicago Opera 1920-25, L.A. 1926 and back to the Met. 1927-30. Considered one of the finest artists in a splendid period at the Met.

Margaret Balfour

English contralto, but an elusive lady as far as obtaining information about her. Obviously a major artist, took part in 1928 recording of Bach Mass in B Minor with E. Schumann, Widdop and Schorr and V.W.'s serenade to Music in 1938.

Kerstin Thorborg (1896- 1970)

Swedish contralto, sang initially in Stockholm. Bruno Walter brought her to Salzburg; then Vienna, Covent Garden and the Met. in 1936. Took part in the famous (live) recording of Mahler's *Song of the Earth*, made in Vienna in May 1936, two days before the Nazis marched in.

Marion Anderson (1902 - 1996)

Little opportunity for a black singer in the U.S. went to Europe where she sang widely in France, Germany, Austria and Scandinavia. Returned to U.S. in 1939 but still met with some resistance. In 1953, appeared at the Met. in *Ballo in Maschera*, being the first black to do so, and thus opening the way for others of her race.

Kathleen Ferrier (1912 - 1953)

Concert and oratorio singer but appeared in the title role of Britten's *Rape of Lucretia* and Gluck's *Orfeo*, the latter at Covent Garden being her last performances. A much loved artist, her career lasted only ten years.

ARCHIVE SINGERS

Mattia Battistini (1857 - 1928)

A bel canto singer whose art was formed before the excesses of verismo had taken root where the main concern was smoothness of line, and the production of beautiful and unforced tone. Sang for 50 years and was known as *la Gloria d' Italia*.

Pol Plancon (1856 - 1914)

As above, and considered "one of the greatest masters of vocal technique that ever trod the stage". Could produce trills and roulades that were the envy of many sopranos.

Tita Ruffo (1877 - 1953)

The prototype verismo baritone, dark, powerful and dramatic, and far from being the unmusical bellow he is sometimes accused of being. Thought to have been the only

singer to have provoked an element of jealousy in Caruso; Ruffo never sang at the Met. until after Caruso's death in 1921.

McCORMACK IRISH PRESSINGS

John McCormack (1884 -1945)

Had a relatively short operatic career, after which he concentrated purely on concert work, singing a wide variety of music from art songs and lieder to the Irish folk songs and ballads for which he is best remembered.

BOOK SALE

1927 Opera at Home (with addenda)	\$5.00
1928 Clara Butt - Her Life Story by Winifred Ponder	\$5.00
1945 Philharmonic Decade by Thomas Russell (London Phil. Orch.)	\$5.00
c1948 NZ Catalogue of Recorded Music (everything from Toscanini to Joe Loss, HMV to R.Z.) bound	\$4.00
1950-51 HMV Catalogue Recorded Music (everything from Nelson Eddy to Jeanette McDonald)	\$4.00
1956 The Castrati in Opera by Angus Heriot (definitive account)	\$5.00
1962 Verdi by Pierre Petit	\$4.00
1968 Ring Resounding by John Culshaw (recording the Ring)	\$5.00
1972 5000 Nights at the Opera by Rudolph Bing (founder of the Edinburgh Festival, General Manager Glynbourne and N.Y. Met.)	\$5.00
1976 Bluebird of Happiness - Memoirs of Jan Peerce by Alan Levy (Comes with programme of Wellington Concert) one of the better singer's biographies	\$5.00
1979 Sir Thomas Beecham by Alan Jefferson (comes with programme of final London concert)	\$5.00
? I hear you calling me by Lily McCormack (bio. of John McCormack by his wife)	\$3.00

The above may be purchased on the day of my presentation or can be reserved (over the phone) by calling 384-5492. There will be some 78s and LPs offered on a free to good homes basis.

company business some years later, I gave them to him to put into the Stanford Archives. Unfortunately a recent inquiry to the library to locate them has proved unsuccessful. It appears their basement was flooded several year ago and they have not been able to get everything sorted out since.

In September 1959 I married Jill Cameron after whirlwind romance. Strangely this did not signal an end to collecting records. In fact I now had a helper to locate records. However there was one small obstacle to our new relationship in the form of a donation of beautifully bound volumes of *The Gramophone*. These came from Hugh McSherry who began taking it regularly in 1929. In my bachelor days I'd developed a habit of reading - cover to cover - a month of *The Gramophone* every night before going to sleep. In order to maintain married bliss I had to forego this custom forthwith!

During our first Christmas together Jill and I took off on a trip to the South Island with three friends. Knowing our route would encompass likely collecting territory, I advertised in advance in all the local newspapers. This gesture was not only successful as regards records but I landed a beautiful over horn Oak HMV Monarch gramophone. This turned up in the first town we visited (Picton) and for the rest of the trip, it was relegated to the trailer which carried our tents, sleeping bags and other life giving essentials.

BETTINI & BURMA ROAD

When our son Timothy was born in February 1961, we began to look for a house because the flat in Newtown was too small to accommodate all our belongings and family. Later that year we moved to a run down property in Burma Road and for the next decade, a lot of my energies and money was poured into putting things right with repiling, rewiring and relining our walls. While this suggests record collecting might have been put on the back burner, it actually ushered in a very intense period of activity, arranging Phonograph and Record Collecting conferences which were held in Wellington at the Dominion Museum. The bonus of these conferences was to meet collectors throughout New Zealand. People like Dennis Brew in Auckland, Rod Cornelius in Dunedin, Wally Gollidge in Nelson and Pam Rogers in Christchurch shared my common interest in machines and records. As a result of this network, my record collection forged ahead in leaps and bounds with some weird and wonderful machines also making their way into my collection. On reflection the 1960s peaked with the production of the Marcella Sembrich 45 rpm reissue of *Voce di primavera* from a rare 5 inch brown wax Bettini cylinder. (see Vol 6 #2) and hosting visits from Laurie Hevingham-Root (Melbourne) and Bill Moran from California. Another factor which highlights this period for me was my interest in Edison's recordings. Not many of the books or periodicals I had were very informative when it came to stating the merits of Edison and Pathé in connection with classical vocals. Other collectors appeared to pay lip service to these companies and did little to improve their understanding of Edison and Páthe's significant contribution to recorded music. In fact I remember being told by some senior collectors that I was wasting my time with such material! Charlie Lindsay and Fred Spencer in their own way were keen to share their experiences on Edison and I was most grateful for their patience and understanding. But they were somewhat limited when it came to evaluating the musical content that these companies produced with their hill and dale method of acoustic recording. While it was easy for me to live with this, I did learn a lot from them regarding the mechanics of which machine

was capable of giving the best sounds over others. In particular I was enthralled with Fred Spencer's Opera phonograph - surely the Rolls Royce of Edison's cylinder machines. Trouble was, it took me some time to locate one and hence my satisfaction from collecting cylinders was always at jeopardy to the slings and arrows of my contemporaries who, could not take seriously the sounds which came from the cheaper machines.

When I accompanied Michael Woolf and David Graves (an American Graphic Designer who designed the Primo Record Label) to Rangiora to tape Walter Norris's Marcella Sembrich's brown wax Bettini cylinder, I placed advertisements in the Christchurch papers in the hope of acquiring records and machines. Amazingly someone responded from Belfast just north of Christchurch and I became the proud owner of a Concert Model Phonograph (the Oak version of the Opera). The picture which commemorates the occasion on the back cover of this issue says it all! It was made as we were having a picnic lunch on the way to being dropped off in Christchurch after spending a day or two recording the Sembrich.

It took me a year or so to fully restore this machine to its former glory but, as I reflect, it has been worth every moment for the enjoyment it has given me and many others who have come to appreciate its ability to reproduce cylinders to their full potential.

WINDS OF CHANGE

When Charlie Lindsay died in 1966 to be followed by Fred Spencer a few years later, it more or less came at a time when a number of us found it increasingly hard to maintain the momentum which had begun at such a furious pace in 1963 with the first convention. It wasn't that record collecting had become a meaningless pastime, but it was hard to maintain activities at a local, let alone national level. The establishment of the Vintage Phonograph Society in Christchurch took some of the heat away from those of us in Wellington who'd pioneered the pattern of National Conventions. Some moved on. Michael Woolf and David Graves went to Australia for a spell, and I committed myself to writing books.

Without any formal charter, rules or regulations regarding the activities of those record collectors we'd been able to gather together in Wellington things drifted aimlessly for a while and finally went into recess for a couple of years until Don Cameron and Jack Root revived the organisation in the mid 1970s. Their crowning glory was to organise another convention in 1975 - the final to be organised in Wellington. However it did see the re-establishment of regular meetings in the capital. Don Cameron took up the reigns with a newsletter which he published in 1976. In this he reported that our group of old record enthusiasts had attracted a nickname called "The Scratchy Record Group". It is alleged that Roger Hart's daughter Emma can be credited with this when she was reported as saying that Daddy's friends loved listening to "scratchy records"!

On the collecting front, I was now a regular subscriber to the RECORD ALBUM, which listed records for sale by the New York dealers Henry and Alice Hirsch. I even hosted them when they took a world trip and spent some time in New Zealand. In 1977 I visited them while I was in New York and heard some very rare records which they played for me in their apartment.

During the early 1970s I'd been introduced to a Karori couple called Steiner. They had been forced to flee Austria because of Nazi persecution. Mrs Steiner was related to Greta

Forst [1878 - 1942], a soprano of the Vienna Imperial Opera. Fortunately the Steiners had managed to extricate themselves from Vienna with most of their possessions intact, including their 78 rpm record collection.

When I eventually purchased records from their estate, this posed the question of creating a specialised section in my collection.

I don't think I gave much thought to this question of specialisation as I began acquiring 78s in 1957. Collecting 78s was not like going into a shop and asking for a specific item. You simply took what you found that looked old and interesting. Very disturbing for some I suppose but part of our colonial heritage when dealers began ordering records by the barrel full - or so I've been told!

In a country which did not manufacture 78s of its own until 1949, record buyers were entirely dependent on imports which came from England. So how did record collectors view the world?

IS THERE LIFE AFTER CARUSO?

As most of the recordings available in New Zealand in the early days of recording came from England, record collectors were not really aware of the high calibre recordings from other countries. Certainly there is nothing wrong with playing Caruso and Galli-Curci recordings till the cows come home, but every collector I have known soon tires of this and seeks something a little different to offset these two great singers in order to get to the nub of record collecting - which if I read it right is to discover a voice of character which stands out from the norm, either in interpretation or individual timbre.

In this instance my friendship with Dennis Brew was very important to me and helped me expand my horizons by listening to singers who were not part of the HMV red label celebrity catalogue. As a consequence of this friendship, I became familiar with Alfred Piccaver, Herman Jadowker, Ivan Koslowsky and other Eastern European singers. Taking a leaf out of his book, I toyed with the idea of focusing on singers like Leo Slezak and Michael Bohnen, but that in the end meant quantity rather than quality. The thing that held me back from this turning point in collecting records was the fact I that I'd already began a thinning out of my collection. For instance, I'd cleared out numerous versions of *E lucevan le stelle* to a modest 6-7. If I went down the path of specialising in all the recordings may be a singer, I'd have to accept everything which Slezak or Bohnen made - good or bad! To drop my own exacting standards of only retaining items that I considered to be exemplary would be conflicting to say the least and one which I could not live with. Of course there were other ways to look at this problem and this is where the Steiner Collection which was so rich in stars from the Vienna Opera helped me avoid the dangerous if not expensive concept of nominating a national grouping for a speciality section. For instance singers under Mahler. Projects like this are very worth while if you can back it up with cash, commitment and dedication. Thankfully I turned my back on this and returned to measuring additions against those top of the range performances I already held, a selection process I continue to employ to this day.

THE RECORD COLLECTOR'S MENOPAUSE

By the mid 1970s I decided that my collection which numbered over 3,000 78s should be culled. It was a thinning process that took me years to achieve and although it became the

brunt of jokes amongst the collecting fraternity for some time, I felt a great sense of satisfaction to be able to go to my shelves and take a record at random and know I would get enjoyment from the performance. When the exercise was completed I think I had just under 1,000 titles.

During this 'getting back to basics' exercise I stopped taking *The Record Collector* in 1972 having already given up *The Gramophone* in the mid 1960s.

Like nearly every collector I have known, there comes a time when you stand aside from what you are doing and begin to re-examine one's commitment to the whole thing. Sometimes a shift of interest - like going down a new path - can stave off the complete termination of collecting records. Often as not this menopause has been caused by some dramatic advance in recorded technology like in 1925 when most companies switched over from acoustic to electrical recording. But in most instances I feel it is caused by repeatedly playing the same recordings which leads to a lack of interest.

In my own case, when I took up collecting once again in the 1980s, I did things which made me look at and examine my collection with a view to deploying it in another light. In 1985 I gave a presentation to the SRG which made use of my magic lantern equipment. For instance playing Oscar Natzke's Village Blacksmith as accompaniment to a set of hand coloured slides added a new dimension to this performance. This made me look into corners of my collection which I'd not explored or developed to any great extent.

I also began to campaign to get the SRG to redefine its aims and objectives beyond an informal gathering of sitting around playing some records. While there was nothing wrong with this, I became increasingly appalled at the lack of documenting the flow of anecdotes and information which these occasions brought forth from members whose experiences were worthy of something better.

Some took this to heart and produced well researched and beautifully printed programmes which I treasure to this day. In the end, in order to give a focus to this outlet I bit the bullet and began production of the G&T Gazette in 1995 which is now in its seventh year. The appearance of this had prompted some within our group to put pen to paper which I'm sure will prove of great benefit to those who follow in our footsteps.

So in the end, after a lot of thought I decided to broaden the range of my collecting which hitherto had been exclusively devoted to vocal recordings. I began expanding my holdings of music hall items as well as instrumentalists and conductors. Then there has been my most recent development of revisiting Edison Diamond Discs and Pathé recordings. As a footnote it may be interesting to note that I still possess a good sampling of Doctor Steiner's recordings, a tantalus if ever there was one!

EPILOGUE

To my way of thinking there have been four generations of record collectors in New Zealand. First there was the acoustic period, roughly 1900 to 1925. Then from 1925 to 1950 electric 78s dominated. With the advent of LPs in 1950 (or thereabouts) inroads began in the way English products dominated what was put on sale in record shops around the country. The gem in the crown as far as collecting 78s in New Zealand during this period was the establishment in Australia of a record plant headed by HMV that gave a distinctive character to record production in Australasia with Homebush's access to

American Victor and Columbia stampers making some interesting selections for collectors.

Despite this bonus EMI still ruled supreme - as can be proven by those who have worked their way through collections that have come up for disposal. Although its a pretty sweeping statement it wasn't until the advent of LPs that this dominance changed. Companies like Scala, Rococo and Preiser were introduced into New Zealand by importers. They used compilations from labels which one had only read about let alone seen. Fonotopia, Polydor, Odeon and a host of smaller labels suddenly revealed a new dimension to the cult of collecting vocal recordings.

Since the advent of CDs and the Internet we can experience the delights of little known companies who produced very exciting items. Running in tandem with the flood of information that is now available to serious record collectors, new areas of interest have developed. Foremost among these would be those who collect New Zealand 78s on indigenous labels like Tanza. Some are even known to collect labels or duty payable stickers. As for New Zealand artists, these have been few and far between. Rosina Buckman I know from experience, is very hard to find in New Zealand. In fact I think I have acquired more of her recordings from overseas sources than here in her own country. Oscar Natzke on the other hand can be readily obtained. Ernest McKinlay and Ana Hato are also sought after by a new generation of collectors as are others which have emerged recently as a direct result of collectors wanting to know who from New Zealand made commercial recordings overseas.

So with this interest in New Zealand artists making up for lost time and books like *For the Record* by Brian Staff establishing an interest in the local pop scene, record collecting in Aotearoa is certainly alive and well. I look forward to the years ahead with interest and optimism!

Bill Main
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