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# G&T GAZETTE

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Established 1995. Incorporating the *Edison Echo*

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BELOW: Edited quotes from "The Extraordinary Operatic Adventures of Blanche Arral" by Blanche Arral, translated by Ira Glackens & William R. Moran, Amadeus Press 2002 pages 326 to 327.

*"Throughout the 1920s Blanche Arral remained buried in suburban New Jersey. When she finally re-emerged, it was into a world vastly different from that of 1918. Radio had grown from occasional experimental squawks to a popular new source of home entertainment. In the wake of that a new hobby was born as a handful of enthusiasts, mostly young and mostly male (today, alas, mostly old and still mostly male), set out to collect the now technologically obsolete records preserving the voices of the great singers of the past.*

*At precisely the same moment, in Bridgeport Connecticut, a like-minded one-time ballet dancer named William H. Seltsam took matters a step farther by founding the International Record Collectors Club, which offered subscribers the opportunity to purchase new limited edition pressings of choice rarities, some even featuring labels individually autographed by the artist. In April 1933 Blanche Arral joined this select list".*

## MEMORIES OF JACK & JOHN

I first met John Gray in the early 1960s through a mutual friend called Jack Henderson. Jack worked for a number of firms in Wellington managing their record department. Originally from Manchester, he worshipped the American soprano Rosa Ponselle. Although I can't be sure, I suspect Jack landed in New Zealand by jumping ship just after the second world war. I have a feeling they forged a friendship when they managed to inveigle their way into the large chorus which is required for *Aida*. This was toured by J. C. Williamson's 1949 Italian Opera Company. During their walk on roles Jack told me they had to tread very carefully in the semi darkness backstage to avoid daubs of expectorant which the principals deposited on the floor as part of their throat clearing preparations!

As my friendship with Jack developed John's name often cropped up in conversation. It was obvious that Jack held great respect for him and his knowledge of music. It was always a source of great regret that I could not get either of them to join me in one of the formative meetings of the Scratchy Record Group in the late 1950s.

When Jack began to off load some of his 78s prior his move to Invercargill, he told me that many of the discs he had in his collection had come from John's personal collection.

There were two discs which I acquired from this source which have held special significance for me. Both were by the mezzo-soprano Conchita Supervia and I think represent the only English titles she recorded. They were *Should he Upbraid & A lesson with the fan*, and *So sweet is she & Oh no John no John*, both of which were released in the early 1930s on Parlophone. After some arm twisting by a number of collectors, I let one of these go but have held onto *Oh no John* because it is a very fine recording and it reminds me of all those pleasant encounters we had at Jack's place in Hanky Street.

After Jack left Wellington, John and I kept a nodding acquaintance with one another at concerts and in the street. Finally in the

## JOHN A. GRAY QSM 1918 - 2004

Born at Dunedin in 1918 John Gray's primary education was followed by a commercial course at King Edward Technical College where full-scale musical activities were conducted by the late Vernon Griffiths. His formal education ceased in 1933 but he continued to attend night classes for two further years when he undertook a musical appreciation course under Professor Galway at Otago University.

He had no formal musical training as such, but a passion for music and theatre led to book reviews for the *Otago Daily Times* and publicity work for the Dunedin Choral and Orchestral Society's.

For a livelihood he worked in a warehouse and the retail trade until war service in the Middle East and Europe intervened. This provided time for extensive concert and opera-going in Cairo, Tel-Aviv, Rome, Milan, Trieste, Vienna and London, all of which developed his knowledge and appreciation of the classical musical repertoire.

On his return to New Zealand he resumed his former occupation until he joined the NZ Broadcasting Corporation in 1949 as a programme cadet in Dunedin. Transferring to Wellington in 1952 he worked as a record buyer and librarian for commercial and national stations. In 1960 he spent a year in London working at the British Institute of Recorded Sound while attending opera and concert performances in London and the Continent.

Returning to New Zealand in 1961 he rejoined the NZ Broadcasting Service as a programme officer and steadily became involved in writing programme notes for NZ Symphony Orchestra, a duty for which he undertook from 1977 until his retirement in 1984.

From 1954 John Gray wrote all the programme notes for the Alex Lindsay String Orchestra's concerts until it was reorganised as the Wellington Regional Orchestra. He was occasionally did the same for the Orpheus Choir and other societies besides. Throughout his career he made broadcasts as a book reviewer and a commentator on Operas. This included a long period from the 1950s to 1964 when he had a monthly radio programme devoted to new recordings.

Extract from "The Recorder" London, England

30th September, 1950

# A QUESTION FACES EVERY HOME

## What Shall We Do With Our Gramophones?

### A BIG INDUSTRY IN A QUANDARY

#### LONG-PLAYING RECORDS THREATEN CHAOS

#### MILLIONS INVOLVED

By The Recorder Industrial Correspondent

**W**HAT are the millions of gramophone users to do? Change over to long-playing records or keep to the normal standard record?

These questions also puzzle the great record-making companies throughout the world, and millions of pounds are involved.

Electric & Musical Industries, Britain's largest makers of gramophone records, have come out on the side of the normal standard record playing at 78 revolutions a minute in the argument technicians are having as to what should be the right speed for a gramophone record.

E.M.I. is beginning a widespread advertising campaign pointing out the virtues of the standard type gramophone record.

#### THREE SPEEDS

This disposes of rumours which began at the British Radio Show at Birmingham this month that E.M.I. will shortly put a record turning at 45 revolutions a minute on to the market and so extend the fight of the three gramophone record speeds, which had been ranging in America for 18 months, over to Britain.

In June this year Decca followed the Americans by launching a 12-inch record which turns at 33 times

a minute and gives a playing time of 25 minutes. The new Decca record requires a new instrument or a modification to old gramophones costing at least £8 18s.

The Decca type of record is being challenged in the United States by R.C.A. Victor with a 45 revolutions per minute new record which plays as long as the old-fashioned 12-inch type. Again a modification is needed to existing gramophones to play this particular type of record.

#### DOUBTS

Gramophone experts agree that the 33 revolutions per minute record with its long playing time has advantages in playing symphonies and other long pieces non-stop, but most of the market in gramophone records is in the popular short hit-tunes and it is doubtful whether the great mass of the public would be in favour of paying up to 39s. 6d. for a long-playing record simply in order to get the particular tune which they want.

#### THEY ARE PLEASED

Also, apart from the additional expense needed to modify old types of gramophones there are technical difficulties attached to the new low-speed records.

For instance, the uninitiated might use the wrong pick-up in

order to play the wrong record, thereby causing damage.

The retail trade is pleased at the signs that E.M.I., which makes H.M.V., Columbia, Parlophone and Regal records in making no change for the time being. In America the battle of the three speeds has caused chaos throughout the gramophone industry and, by reducing demand for standard records, has caused ruin to many small shopkeepers who were caught with large stocks.

#### ONE SPEED

E.M.I. experts are hopeful that this struggle among the technicians will resolve itself into a final decision to adopt one gramophone speed throughout the world.

Dealers in Decca new long-playing records reported a brisk trade when they were first introduced, and the Company is badly behind with orders both for records and equipment.

Later reports indicate that much of the early demand is now losing its impetus.

Decca's sales department report that there has been only a slight falling off in demand for symphonies on the old-fashioned type of gramophone record since the long-playing disc was introduced.

With Compliments

from

Sir Ernest Fisk

Electric & Musical Industries Ltd.,  
Blyth Road,  
Hayes, Middlesex,  
England.  
and  
His Master's Voice (N.Z.) Ltd.

The man who wrote this misguided declaration of intent for EMI in September 1950, Sir Ernest Fisk, was removed as managing director the following year. I can recall LPs making their debut in New Zealand in late 1951, but I didn't make my first purchase in that field until 1954 when I bought a radiogram and a copy of Mozart's 'Jupiter' Symphony on a 10 inch LP Decca recording LX3022 Kleiber and the LPO.

This fragile document on very thin paper was given to me by John Gray.

During this period he served for a number of years on the Committee of the Wellington Chamber Music Society and was later co-opted as an Executive member of the Music Federation from which he resigned in 1970 to concentrate on his broadcasting work.

After retirement he returned for some months as Personnel Officer for Joy Tonks who was writing a history of the NZSO which was published in 1986. For this work he contributed several of the appendices and the index.

For a non-musician this was in some ways an extraordinary career. His duties enabled him to concentrate on gathering and retaining information about composers, their works and the instrumentation thereof. As well he compiled files on the careers and repertoires of famous artists plus a vast number of other details about music and recordings; encyclopaedic knowledge that had little practical use beyond someone in his position.

He was awarded a Queen's Service Medal 1989 "for services to broadcasting and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra."



1980s I managed to get him to give a talk to our group; the subject being his reminiscences of various singers whose concerts he'd attended in New Zealand. A programme I supported by playing recordings from my collection. Unfortunately only two members of our group turned up for this wonderful evening,

In the 1990s, I was invited to attend one of Ray's Thursday *soiree's* in Wallace Street. Imagine my surprise when I found them ensconced listening to records, sipping gin and smoking cigarettes like a bunch of naughty schoolboys. What an incredible revelation!

After I'd established the *G&T Gazette*, I made a practise of forwarding John copies which I think he enjoyed. As a result of this he reciprocated by sending me a bundle of clippings and miscellaneous scripts, one of which was a potted *curriculum vitae* which I've used as a basic reference for this tribute.

The last time I saw John was when I collected him to visit to Ray in the Alexandra Home a year or so before Ray died.

As a back room boy with the NZSO, we can never underestimate his role in the high standard he maintained with his programme notes which he made for the orchestra. His staggering knowledge of music and those who are personally involved with in its production will be sorely missed.

I would place John's name along with Jack and Ray in that first generation of record collectors who set out with sagacious tenacity to put the art of collecting records in New Zealand on the map in an international sense. In John's case this was ably demonstrated in the form of letters which were published in journals like *The Gramophone* and *Opera*\*. When books like J. M. Thomson's *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* is revised, I look forward to seeing John Gray's contributions to this cultural pursuit proudly proclaimed.

\* Some time into my friendship with Jack Henderson, he gave me a bundle of letters from Leo Reimens to John Gray. Unfortunately, I have mislaid them but I have vivid recollections of one which concerned the voice of the contralto Kathleen Ferrier. Both John and Leo it seems did not like he method of production!

PLEASE!



# DON'T HOARD OLD RECORDS

*They are  
URGENTLY REQUIRED  
... for SALVAGE*

We know that there are hundreds of thousands of old records in and around the country which have long outlived their usefulness.

These records, if salvaged, can be reborn.

They can be ground up, mixed with a small percentage of virgin ingredient, and then find their way back to the public again via the dealer's shop, giving new pleasure and new cheer in the camps and canteens of

the Forces, in war factories ('Music While You Work' and other B.B.C. programmes), in the home, in fact, everywhere that music can be enjoyed, instead of collecting dust and cluttering odd corners and cupboards.

Please take all those old records you don't want to your local gramophone dealer and so make it possible to maintain the supply of new ones.

**ARTICLES FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE G & T  
GAZETTE ARE URGENTLY REQUIRED!  
DON'T HESITATE. RESPOND NOW TO  
DEMONSTRATE YOUR VIEWS ON  
RECORD COLLECTING IN NEW ZEALAND.**

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