G&T GAZETTE

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MAY/JUNE 2004

OBITUARY

WILLIAM R. MORAN

(JUly 29th 1919 - Jan. 22nd 2004)

With the death of Bill Moran we lose both an indefatigable collector and someone who set new discographical standards. His first of over 80 contributions to *The Record Collector* was in 1952, his last in December 2000. Over almost 50 years books, discographies, articles, letters and addenda and corrigenda to published work poured from his home, since 1929, at La Cañada, California.

To encapsulate such a man is daunting. His life as a geologist, his career with Union Oil, becoming Vice President of its Minerals Exploration Corporation, and his work in establishing, at his alma mater, the Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound have been amply summarised by Andrew Farkas (The Record Collector, V0L. 35, nos. 8-10, (1990), pp.256-260.) Outside his profession, the long hours and the intellectual effort of music and musicology offered relaxation. To meet a Scandinavian collector, to visit a retired singer in Brazil, to unearth unpublished memoirs, to read the many thousands of books shelved in every room in the house or to write up his findings were all pleasures in themselves. His output of musicological writings is even more remarkable in view of his many absences, often for months, in remote parts of the Pacific and South America, far from research materials.

Bill was a man of unassailable logic: for any research project he established basic, scientifically-sound principles. Earlier than most, he perceived both that discography could never be taken seriously without the scholarship expected elsewhere and that the only identification of any recording was through its complete matrix number. It seems so obvious - now - but things were very different then. Thus and otherwise, as early as the 193os he identified those areas of the Victor vaults most likely to yield unpublished records for W.H.Seltsam's then-new IRCC. Elsewhere, he located the remarkable group of Sembrich Victor tests, finally released on IRCC L7037. His death breaks one of the last links with those exciting times.

Bill was quick to eschew the piano (whose pitch varies with environment and recent history) for pitching records; he employed the metal pipes of a fearsome, wheezing Aeolian organ, which he had himself restored, to working order. He demonstrated that stroboscope speeds are whole numbers only in certain cases and - to the enduring mystification of his old friend Desmond Shawe-Taylor that this became critical when pitching to 1 rpm: ergo, he produced his own set of custom-made stroboscopes. He realised that using a European 50 Hz stroboscope in 60 Hz America offered further speed bands (an accidental benefit available, in reverse, in 50 Hz countries). His scientific mind exposed fakes of all kinds, ranging from fraudulent international exchanges to a purported Jean de ResAe record, and from a 'Patti' cylinder to an 'unknown' Caruso 'Di quella pira', with a 14-second high C, 'discovered' by the irrepressible Eddie Smith. The purging from the mind of some persistent, intrusive tune was, he maintained, achievable by humming 'In quelle trine morbide'. Yet logic was usually tempered with humour: the giant cup he used at breakfast was, he explained to me, there in case the physician ever limited him to one cup of coffee per day.

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When it came to putting this edition together, I baulked at the task of writing an obituary for Bill Moran having read Michael Henstock's moving tribute. This is published by courtesy of *The Record Collector*. Other items in this issue have come from Des WIlson and Peter Burgis. My contribution is the article below on Maurice Rossiter which I came across some years ago and have been hoarding it for such an occasion like this. *WM*

NEW ZEALAND FREE LANCE, OCTOBER 4, 1944—Page 8

BY OUR REPRESENTATIVES

"Physique, Appearance, Voice"

Booked for Fame? Likely Young Bass

SIX weeks after his arrival in England to continue his musical career 21-year-old Maurice Rossiter cabled his parents (Mr. and Mrs. F. L. Rossiter of Wellington): "Won best scholarship Royal Academy, Stokes scholarship."

Since he was 17 Maurice has wanted to sing. "I've got something inside me I've got to express," he would say. Some voices are trained to perfection, but the Wellington lad has a comparatively untrained bass of exceptional range. Until he left New Zealand he had only had two terms and a-half of tuition. When Dr. J. F. Staton (examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music) visited New Zealand in 1939 he heard Maurice and remarked: "I haven't heard anybody in festivals in England or New Zealand to compare with him." Peter Dawson also heard the young singer and stopped Mr. Rossiter in the street to comment: "Your boy has a beautiful voice." As Anderson Tyrer said, he has the physique, appearance and voice required for a career.

When Maurice was 18 he entered the Army and was later transferred to the Air Force, but after two years was discharged as medically unfit for overseas service. On the day he was released Maurice went to the Royal Academy of Music representative for the privilege of a late entry for approaching examinations. Everyone was astonished that, when looking down the list, he chose the L.R.S.M., but he was resolute and with only six weeks in which to study he sailed through with a high percentage.

On arrival in England Maurice was met by his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs.

Maurice Rossiter. The Royal Academy's best scholarship won in six weeks.

Maurice D'Oisly (Rosina Buckman, the New Zealand prima donna), who are also his godparents. He is making his home with them, and after a visit to their country-estate in Wales they are now back in London. The D'Oislys are both on the teaching staff of the Royal Academy of Music. They had intended taking Maurice to Sir Henry Wood, but were unable to do so before the conductor's death. Days are full for the Wellington lad and he wrote to his parents: "I am working like a Trojan."

A QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING

I was somewhat surprised to be asked to address this conference but came to realise that it was probably because I'd been observed frequently going through the National Library's collection of sheet music. Having photocopied what I was looking for (if I was fortunate enough to find it) I might be expected to then take the music home, put it up on the piano, and proceed to play or sing it, or even both. But that is not the case: I am looking for the words.

This goes back to a life-long love of music with a particular emphasis on recorded vocal music. I think the first record I ever bought was a 78 of Jussi Björling singing two operatic arias. At that time I wasn't at all interested in what the words were saying; I simply revelled in the sound of the voice and the glorious music it was singing. In the days of the 78 texts and translations were never supplied with single discs, only with complete opera sets and some lieder albums. This all changed with the advent of the LP. Gradually we were offered the words so it was possible to follow what the singer was singing about.

I've come to the conclusion that listeners fall into three categories – those who aren't interested at all in the text and just love the music for its own sake (this applies particularly to opera), those who like to have some idea of what the song or aria is about, and those, like myself, who really want to know the text. Certainly I find it baffling that people can listen to, say, a lieder recital on CD without ever bothering to consult the texts, and then offer an opinion on the performance. This does great injustice to both composer and singer. Composers take great care in choosing their poets and librettists, and the music they write is obviously a response to the written word. And it's this response that the singer is reflecting in his or her performance. Over the years I've interviewed many singers and have often asked the question "In studying a new song or operatic role where do you start?" The answer is always the same – with the words.

All this, then, led to my trying to track down the texts of songs and arias which weren't supplied by the record company. Many of them I was able to locate in libraries and, more recently, on the Internet, but a lot of the more obscure items still elude me.

So far I've been talking about music sung in foreign languages, and one could be forgiven for thinking that there is no problem when the piece is

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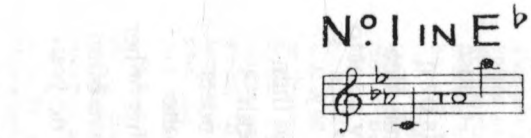

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sung in English.
But, in fact, this is not the case, and there are many instances in which it's hard to pick up the words. Sometimes this is because the composer has made it difficult for the singer to get them across. On Jonathan Lemalu's debut CD there's a wonderful song by Michael Head called "The Estuary". I played it over and over but was never able to decipher the words at the end of the song where the music rises above the stave and becomes more impassioned. (EMI have since put up the text on their website so we are now enlightened).
But people like me who collect ancient 78's often strike problems of comprehension because of the primitive recording techniques. There are some discs I have of songs in English where virtually none of the words is intelligible.
There are also the occasions when the mondegreen syndrome comes into play. This is what happens when we mishear words and come up with something quite wrong but what we think we heard. A friend tells me that when he was a boy he thought that the tenor aria in Messiah was "Come for tea, my people". There's also "A monk fishing" – a child's misunderstanding of the opening words of the Hail Mary. (Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou a monk fishing).
The word "mondegreen" comes from someone's mishearing of the folk song "The Bonny Earl o' Moray" which begins
"Ye Hielands and ye Lowlands, O where hae ye been?
They hae slain the Earl o' Moray and laid him on the green".
This second line was rendered as "They hae slain the Earl o' Moray and Lady Mondegreen".
In trying to put right my own personal mondegreens I was fortunate to be based in Wellington and have access to the Radio New Zealand music library. This had been built up over many years going right back to the very beginnings of public broadcasting in the 1920's. In those early days the emphasis was on live performance by local artists, so a music library was considered to be essential. I am glad to say that this collection has now been transferred to the National Library where any member of the public can consult it.
Of course, I've also spent many hours searching through sheet music in second hand shops but there is much less of it around than there was. I think this is because the music usually came from estates where the con-

tents of a house would often include a piano and a collection of music. But the days when people made music at home have long vanished and estates these days don't usually include such things.
Many of the songs in English that have interested me have no really great musical worth but they are part of our cultural heritage and therefore worthy of being preserved. In this respect the Sound and Music Centre at the National Library is doing a wonderful job of preservation. My hope would be that collections offered will continue to be accepted, even although they'll probably contain the hundredth copy of "The Floral Dance" that the librarian has encountered. And it would be nice too if a proper data base of the collection could be established. I know that this entails an enormous amount of work, especially if, as in my ideal world, the data would include the names of the librettists/poets as well as those of the composers.
I still carry about with me my wish list of songs not yet located. The most elusive are those which probably never sold in any great quantities, and songs by American composers. In the early years of the last century many of the great singers based in New York recorded American songs which never seem to have caught on in the rest of the English speaking world and were probably never published in England or Australia, our two main sources of sheet music. But with more and more song texts appearing on the Internet I may yet find what I want. It is very satisfying, after years of wondering what those words sung on that old record are, to finally seem them in print.

Communication from Peter Burgis regarding
"Love's Melodies" pages 4/5

(Western Australia)6/4/2004

Dear Bill,
Another Kiwi. They are everywhere! This lady was also a busy composer with at least two dozen compositions to her credit. I wonder if she visited the UK? Sheet is undated,looks about 1921.

For Bill, collecting was more than records: he endorsed the maxim of the invaluable, albeit fallible, Kutsch & Riemens, *'Colligite fragmenta ne pereant'* ('Gather the fragments, lest they be lost'). With that concern for the history of recording that led him to make major bequests of money and materiel to Stanford and ' latterly, to the University of California, Santa Barbara, he scoured the world for ephemera, the unconsidered trifles of the` collecting world and of its'early artists and engineers. Thus, many a box of irreplaceable documentation, long-neglected and perhaps approaching destruction, at the back of a garage in some backwater of Wyoming or New South Wales found its way into university research facilities for preservation, cataloguing and study. How many hours, he reasoned, could be saved if the long sequence of Klein's important contributions to The Gramophone was collected and, above all, indexed within a single volume? Instead of wishing 'If only...', Bill did it. A similar philosophy produced his Nellie Melba: A Contemporary Review, a collection of arcane pieces by a galaxy of writers, famous and obscure, on the singer whom I think he revered above all. The recently-published memoirs of Blanche Arral were his final major editing task.

Over a long collecting life Bill's research materials - cuttings, catalogues, photographs, booklets, periodicals, manuscripts and typescripts of many kinds, books in many languages - and some 40,O00 records culled from everywhere from Chile to Tokyo made him almost uniquely qualified as an investigator into the byways of record-collecting. His insistence on precision, above all in his own meticulous work, did not endear him to the practitioners of the arm-waving school of writing. He saw it as a duty to share his own standards and immense knowledge with those from whom the US Mail brought a weekly barrage of appeals, even with those whom he described as asking him, as he put it, "to sew a shirt on to the button that they had supplied". It grieved him that his failing health of the last several years, commencing with the arthritis that prevented him lifting a record from the shelf, still less using a typewriter, precluded even the apologetic reply that he was physically unable to assist the enquirer.

His *causes célèbres* were the stuff of legend, notably his dispute (which lasted for decades, through, numerous scholarly articles from both sides) with the late John Stratton over who sang 'A ce mot' in Les Huguenots on that famous Mapleson cylinder. Wherever Bill is now, I've no doubt that he's explaining to Melba just how he deduced that it couldn't possibly have been Suzanne Adams.

I can still see him, whisky in hand, muffled against the chill of the back-room of an Irish pub, listening on the landlord's portable player to an LP of McCormack songs.

it was a privilege to know him.

Michael Henstock

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