G&T GAZETTE

Established 1995 Incorporating the *Edison Echo*

JUNE/JULY 2005

ANNA CASE

EDITORIAL

This issue of the *G&T Gazette* coincides with a special presentation by Des Wilson and your editor which will feature Edison Hill & Dale recordings - both cylinder and disc.
When this fill-in programme was originally conceived, it was intended to also incorporate records made by the French firm Pathé Freres. However due to circumstance beyond our control, it was decided to restrict the programme to recordings from the Edison company. Perhaps Pathé might be accommodated in 2006 if another gap occurs due to a declining membership?
Looking around for a suitable feature for the *Gazette* to coincide with the occasion. I decided to draw upon a book which I have known for some time called *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph* - a century in retrospect by John & Susan Edwards Harvith and published by the Greenwood Press. The authors write very knowingly about Edison recordings, his company and his outrageous views on music. Their knowledge was gained primarily by interviewing artists who were contracted to Edison. To give our readers the flavour of the book, I have extracted part of the Harvith's introduction and an interview they held with Anna Case in 1972.
Our tenth anniversary of the G&T Gazette will occur with the August/September issue. It would be wonderful if someone could do a review of our activities over the last ten years and forward it for publication!

Cover photo: Our illustration on the cover comes from a treasured book in my collection called *Opera Singers* by Kobbé, a 1913 publication.

Part of an introduction to *Edison, Musicians, and the phonograph*

Although Edison's disc catalog was to boast the considerable talents of Lucrezia Bori, Anna Case, Emmy Destinn, Frieda Hempel, Margaret Matzenauer, Claudia Muzio, Elisabeth Schumann, Maggie Teyte, Karl Jörn, Giovanni Martinelli, Jacques Urlus, Giovanni Zenatello, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Moriz Rosenthal, Carl Flesch, Albert Spalding, and Mischa Violin, among others, this proved to be no match for the Victor galaxy of Caruso, Farrar, Schumann-Heink, Galli-Curci, Ponselle, Tetrazzini, Melba, McCormack, Paderewski, Cortot, de Pachmann, Heifetz, Elman, Kreisler, Zimballst, Toscanini, Stokowski, and Muck. Some artists appeared on both the Edison and Victor labels: Hempel, Destinn, Matzenauer, Bori, Martinelli, and Rachmaninoff, to name some notable examples. And there were countless other top non-Edison artists such as Paul Whiteman, Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Nora Bayes, Fannie Brice, Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Ted Lewis, and George Olsen.

Edison could have lured a number of big-name artists away from his competitors, but he either disliked their artistry (Titta Ruffo, Al Jolson, Bessie Smith) or was unwilling to pay them large sums of money. Pianist Josef Adler, for instance, told us he accompanied Fritz Kreisler in numerous tests for Edison; Kreisler was delighted with the sound quality of the test records, Adler said, but could not come to a mutually satisfactory financial agreement. As Theodore Edison says :He objected to paying the stars the tremendous money they demanded, as he felt that just as good voices could be found in other singers who might merely lack the stage presence of opera stars and not have the reputations. Even though fie liked and recorded a few famous artists, he didn't take much stock in big reputations; he had his own ideas about that."

Therefore, although Edison was willing to put approximately $3 million into the perfection of his Diamond Disc with the goal of reproducing the human voice as accurately as possible, he was not willing to reward musical artistry financially. He signed very few famous artists to exclusive contracts and in many cases recorded a small number of selections by top-ranking musicians in order to use their names for advertising value.

Edison also refused to record major American symphonic ensembles acoustically, as Victor and Columbia did, because he wanted to hear each individual instrument. In 1918 E. C. Boykin, chairman of Edison's Disc Record Promotion Committee, wrote to company vice-president William Maxwell, voicing his (and many dealers') hope that Edison would record the Boston Symphony Orchestra: "As I sat in Symphony Hall, listening to the Orchestra, I thought a great deal of what it would mean to us if we could record an Organization that enjoys such a high musical standing." Boykin had written Maxwell in

response to a letter from C., S. Cornell, music department manager for an Edison jobber in Knoxville, Tennessee, who complained about the lack of a name orchestra on the Diamond Disc well responded to Cornell:

Five years ago I had a long and pleasant interview with Major Higginson of Boston, who is the patron and proprietor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He would gladly have given his consent that we record the Orchestra, but Mr. Edison finally decided he would not do so until he had perfected his recording technique to a point where he could do ample justice to a large orchestra-in other words, until he had perfected it to a point where he could record a large orchestra as well as he records a small Orchestra."

Thus Edison could have recorded Karl Muck and the Boston Symphony four years before Victor.

At the same time that Victor waged aggressive mass advertising campaigns, Edison relied mostly on tone tests to sell his products, with relatively little exposure sought through national advertising. In 1925 Walter Miller complained to Edison about this:

Tone-testing may be all right, but it is too dam [sic] slow to ever accomplish anything as against a competitor who advertises extensively. In the past years we have all agreed that the Edison was much better than the Victor, and I think we are sincere in our convictions, but during this time the Victor has sailed in and di~ the bulk of the business which they could not have done in any way without successful advertising, as comparative tests would always defeat them. Now they have a much improved outfit and with their policy of national advertising we will certainly be up against it."

There were other impediments to Edison's success:

1 The fact that his records could be played only with a special Diamond Disc reproducer, which could not play Victor's lateral-cut discs, though Edison machines could be equipped with a lateral reproducer. A few non-Edison machines, most notably the Brunswick Ultona, could be equipped with an Edison reproducer, but they were very costly

2 The costliness of the New Edison phonograph, which automatically restricted the potential audience for Diamond Discs. Victor, on the other hand, offered a cheap table model for ten dollars with corresponding machines for every pocketbook.

3 The bulkiness of the ten-ounce, quarter-inch-thick discs, which were first issued with di difficult-to- read etched labels that often omitted the names of the artists, some of them quite well known. Although they were double-faced (the Victor Red Seal records were single-faced) a number of operatic Diamond Discs were brought out with a musical selection on one side backed by elocutionist Harry Humphrey reading prosaic program notes on the other.

4 The fact that it took Edison longer to manufacture his records and get them onto the market, which was crucial in terms of hits. The Edison discs were moulded; Victor's were stamped like waffles. By the early 1920s, when Diamond Disc production methods had improved to the point where hits could be issued within six days, the market for Edison discs began to decline.

5 Edison's resistance and delayed switchover to electric recording.

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.

Not surprisingly, musicians hold their own widely divergent views on recording. Although the following interviews do not pretend to represent a cross-section of all musicians' attitudes toward recording, they do raise provocative questions as to how celebrated musicians intend their recordings to be heard and how accurate they feel their recordings are as a legacy. Should recordings be regarded as definitive statements? Do they represent a separate medium? Have they and the processes of recording changed the way musicians perform both for the microphone and for audiences? How have they changed the way we listen? Should they be letter perfect? A number of musicians address directly and candidly these issues and many others,

In addition, Theodore Edison and Edison recording artists Anna Case, Samuel Gardner, Ernest Stevens, and Donald Voorhees offer some observations on the inventor of the phonograph; legendary concert manager Arthur Judson recalls his experiences during the "dark ages" of acoustical recording; record producers Thomas Frost, John Pfeiffer, and Sam Parkins and engineer Ray Moore explore recording techniques and philosophies; University of Michigan ethnomusicologist William Malm speaks about recording and non-Western musical cultures; former Muzak vice-president Jane Jarvis outlines the theory and practice of turning music into Muzak; and B. H. Haggin discusses the recording industry from his perspective of over fifty years as a recordings critic. The interviews are arranged in more or-less chronological order with respect to the history of recording, from Edison figures and others who were active early in the century to record producers working with the latest developments in digital sound.

ROGER HART'S turntable for playing 78's is caput! We all join with him in his hour of grief! Can any kind soul in our organisation ameliorate this situation by proving him with a replacement? Roger's telephone number is. . .
Wellington 384 5492.

ANNA CASE

Born in Clinton, New Jersey, October 29, 1889; died in New York City, January 7, 1984. Vocal training under Mine. Augusta Ohrstrom-Renard. Began career as church singer in Plainfield, New Jersey. Member, Metropolitan Opera Company, 1909-15, 1916-17. First American-born, totally American-trained artist to join the Metropolitan. Assumed roles in two U.S. premieres at the Metropolitan in 19-13: Feodor in Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov with Toscanini conducting and Sophie in Strauss's Der Rosenkavalier, opposite Frieda Hempel and Margarete Ober. Also sang A Happy Shade in Gluck's Orfeo ed Euridice with Louise Homer, Johanna Gadski, and Toscanini; MIcaëla in Bizet's Carmen with Geraldine Farrar and Enrico Caruso; and Olympia in Offenbach's The Tales of Hoffmann. Left the Metropolitan to pursue an active career as recitalist and soprano soloist with orchestras throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Also a composer of songs; sang her own "Song of the Robin" at the Metropolitan Opera concert of January 18, 1920. Performed as one of the three genii in Mozart's Die Zauberflöte in a Victor-recorded excerpt (Red Seal 88441, listed in the 1913 Victor Book of the Opera) with Johanna Gadski as Pamina. A favorite artist of Thomas Edison, first recorded for him in 1914, went on to record an extensive list of concert and operatic selections for Edison and to sing at tone test concerts next to the Edison Diamond Disc phonograph. Her Edison recording of "Charmant Oiseau" from La Perle A Brésil by David chosen for the first coast-to-coast broadcast in connection with the opening of the transcontinental telephone line. Her last Edison recordings-still acoustical-made in 1926. Made a series of electrical recordings for Columbia shortly before abandoning her career to marry entrepreneur Clarence H. Mackay in 1931,

Interview
September 19, 1972
New York City

CASE: Edison was extraordinary in his demand for eve thing that was just perfection. He was very strict with everybody. He was very deaf; he used to sit with his hand cupped over his ear. Every note had to be perfect. It seemed that he liked what I did. One day he asked me if I would come over to the studio and make a record of just my scales. And he then made the remark that my scales were absolutely perfect!
At the time I made the records, they didn't make them like they make today. You had to gauge your own distance from the horn for every note. At first, I was guided by a man holding my arm; if I was to get closer, he'd pull me closer, if further away, he'd pull me this way. Finally, I got so that could do it myself, and I think I did all the acoustical records that way, People used to tell me that, with the Edison recordings, it was just as

if, l was standing in the room singing.
HARVITHS: Do you remember exactly what happened at your first Edison recording session?
CASE- No, except that I can imagine what happened: I was scared to death. I was always nervous because I was overanxious to have everything perfect. Of course, we had to make three recordings of everything. If one record was not clear (Edison had to hear everything), we had to do the record over. But it was very trying because you got very tired when you sang the same thing over and over. When we came to the masters, we were already tired and more nervous than ever that the masters wouldn't be as good as the tests.
HARVITHS: Did it change your interpretation?
CASE: No, I didn't change my interpretation at all; I sang with just the same expression. I always tried through the horn or the microphone to make a picture in the minds of the people listening, by the tone of my voice. Artists must make a picture of what they're singing by putting feeling in their voice. They can put tears in their voice, laughter in their voice, hate in their voice. No matter what it is, they must create a picture. Edison was very strict, but he was very fine. When he gave me that photograph that you see there, he looked up at me with a twinkle in his eye and said, "I hope that the tremolo will stay out of your voice as long as the tremble has stayed out of my hand."
Edison had great musicians in his little orchestras. Sometimes I had my accompanist-Charles Gilbert Spross-at the piano, for songs I had sung in concert. He and I, of course, had rehearsed these many times. But with a band or orchestra for the arias, we just had run-throughs before we made the record, They would get the idea of the sound, whether I was too close to the horn or whether I was too far away. I had to turn away when I had a high note, so as not to blast the machine. As I said before, I learned to do all that so they didn't have to guide me afterwards; it just became natural.
Edison had to hear every word you sang. If you slid over a word, and he didn't catch it, you had to make the record over. Everything had to sound right because the record made the picture for the public to hear. And you can't create a picture of what you're singing if they don't hear the words, and that goes not only for making records, but also on the concert stage, when you're giving recitals.
HARVITHS: Was Edison's hearing as bad as people say it was?
CASE: He had to cup his ear. I don't know whether he heard well if people just spoke with him or not. But I never thought about whether he could hear or not, because if he didn't hear, you had to make the record over until he did hear. He absolutely demanded perfection in everything--not only the music but the words, And the expression.
HARVITHS, He was the one who had the final say on the recordings?,
CASE: Yes.
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 I 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.

HARVITHS: Do you remember the Carnegie Hall recital?

CASE: I remember I stood right beside the machine. The audience was there, and there was nobody on stage with me. The machine played and I sang with it. 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] .

HARVITHS: Were you responsible for choosing your recorded repertoire for Edison?

CASE: Oh, yes. I insisted on that, because you, naturally, want to do the aria or the song that you know you can do best, Still, many times they chose the songs, but it was always my privilege to choose the arias.

HARVITHS: So they did choose some songs that they wanted you to sing?

CASE: Well, now and then. Not very often. I didn't do those with orchestra; I did them with piano, and, as I said, Mr. Spross usually accompanied me.

HARVITHS: Do you feel that it was too much of a strain to do three masters?

CASE. No. The minute you said, "Oh my, I don't feel I can do it well the next time," they'd say, "Well, that's all for today," or something like that.

HARVITHS: So they wouldn't let you overwork your voice.

CASE: No. Well, no one should. I always recorded in the morning. That's when you do your best, when you're rested. But of course, it wasn't like singing before the public. If you're giving a recital and you make a mistake, you can't stop and do it over again and say, "I'll do it better this time." No, you can't do that, you finish.

Artists are human beings. They're very sensitive people. And they're more anxious to do their very best because the whole world is going to hear them.

The *G&T Gazette* is published as time permits and distributed gratis to friends and associates who attend or share in the interest of a group known as the "Scratchy Record Group". Opinions expressed in the *Gazette* are those of the authors and do not represent the philosophies and beliefs of the SRG. Unsolicited material is welcome. Care with submissions for publication will be exercised, but no responsibility for loss or damage in transit will be accepted. Advertising rates are negotiable. The *G&T Gazette* is produced on a Macintosh G3 and Canon Film Scan. 93 Burma Road, Wellington - 6004 New Zealand. Telephone (04)971-3535, e-mail <wmain@paradise.net.nz>