

G&T GAZETTE

Established 1995. Incorporating the *Edison Echo*

July/August/September

2009

THE
ROMANCE OF THE
GRAMOPHONE.

By

T. LINDSAY BUICK, F.R. HIST. S.

AUTHOR OF

"OLD MARLBOROUGH," "OLD MANAWATU," "AN OLD
NEW ZEALANDER," "THE TREATY OF WAITANGI,"
"NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST WAR."

WELLINGTON, N.Z.
ERNEST DAWSON, LTD.
40 MANNERS ST.,

EDITORIAL

There has been a disappointing response to my suggestion that the group might like to nominate a famous personality to be remembered during the course of a year by programming a recording made by the individual elected by popular choice. To start the ball rolling, I played a Caruso recording during my presentation in July and welcomed others to follow suit. As there wasn't time to discuss this suggestion, it is still on the table if anyone wants to bring it up during the remaining presentations of 2009.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find I have reprinted the preface for Lindsay Buick's book, *The Romance of the Gramophone* which achieved some notoriety when Roland Gelatt noted its existence in his 1956 book called *The Fabulous Phonograph*. This alerted me and other New Zealand collector's into a hunt through second hand book shops for copies. I finally tracked one down in Bet-hunes book auction where it used to turn up periodically. It will be noted from the cover illustration that it was published by Ernest Dawson Ltd, whose little transfer we often encounter on 78 rpm records which they sold through their shop in Manners Street. My copy has a pencilled inscription beneath the date stating that 600 copies were printed.

Another point worth noting from this book is on the back cover. It is a picture taken in the old Concert Chamber of the Wellington Town Hall during the demonstration of some equipment or recordings. It shows the auditorium full to capacity along with a note that there was no spare seating upstairs. Unfortunately, Mr Buick does not tell us in his book, what the reason was for this recital? Was it a demonstration of recordings using some instrument like an acoustic HMV re-entrant gramophone, or some electrical system using a pick up and amplifier? Unfortunately, I haven't the time to go through papers of this period to find the answer to this question.

Which brings me to what I consider one of the points raised by Mr Buick book. Its the mention of Professor Archibald's tour of New Zealand in 1891 with what I take to be an Improved Edison phonograph. I have downloaded this on the internet from *Paperspast* - a wonderful service which is provided by the National Library. In this you will see mention of the baritone Snazelle who came to New Zealand and gave concerts. I played this famous whistling song during one of my programmes a year or so ago.

Finally, I continue to write about collectors I have known. This takes us up to the point in the 1960s when the first convention of Record and Phonograph Collectors was held here in Wellington.

Good listening.

Bill Main

PREFACE.

I have written this book in the hope that it will interest my fellow gramophonists in New Zealand. There are many such in this Dominion, and there must be a proportion of them who would like to know something of the origin of the instrument they have made their hobby. The fact that this year witnesses the Jubilee of the invention of the Phonograph may also supply a justification for the appearance of such a volume.

The story of the gramophone has, of course, long been available to the student who has been blessed with the time and the industry to search it out. Not everyone, however, is so blessed, and many, no doubt, will be glad to have the opportunity of enjoying the feast when it is prepared for them. If they derive as much pleasure from reading this volume as I have had in compiling it, all will be well repaid.

In writing these pages my desire has been to give an historical account of the gramophone rather than a technical description of it. Technicalities have, therefore, been avoided wherever possible and the narrative confined to a simple statement of fact, so far as the facts could be gleaned from the authorities available. This, I believe, is the course of which most readers will approve. There may be some

who would have desired greater detail concerning the new recordings, and the newer types of gramophones which, to cope with the new recordings, are being evolved. My answer to that can only be that this phase of gramophonizing is so much in a state of flux that any description which would be accurate to-day might very well be obsolete to-morrow. To say more than I have said, so far from the centre of first-hand information, would be neither wise nor profitable.

It has been suggested to me that I should have included in these pages a chapter on records. I have not done so because I consider the story of the gramophone and the story of the records two distinct subjects. If, however, the reading gramophonists display a sufficiently appreciative interest in this little volume, there is no reason why another on records should not follow. In the meantime, however, what I have here written must be considered "sufficient unto the day."

I am frequently asked—What will the future of the gramophone be? To enter into meticulous details would be but to provoke foolish prophecy. I am, however, firmly convinced that the future state of the gramophone will be much more wonderful than its present. When we consider what has been achieved with the "Auditorium" type of gramophone and the promise of an instrument with a magazine, which will play twelve records without stopping, we may well believe that the days of mechanical improvement are not over. Yet it is probable the improvement will come more in the record than in the means

of reproduction. Whether these records are to be in ribbon form, covering whole operas and complete oratorios, or whether the recording is to be done by a ray of light or by any other process, it is reasonably safe to say that our application of the science of acoustics to the gramophone will no more stand where it is, than it stood where it was after the invention of the phonograph. Perfection may never be reached, but assuredly there will be further vast strides towards that goal.

I am also frequently asked to say whether I think the gramophone, as a source of entertainment, will be superseded by radio. To this question my answer must be, emphatically, "No." I do not hold this view because I am in any way contemptuous of radio. Far from it. Wireless is a wonderful thing; perhaps more wonderful than we realise, for it may be that the greatest thing about it has not yet been discovered. But wonderful as it is I do not think it will ever seriously challenge the gramophone, because there is room for both. There is a field of usefulness for each and the one need not trespass upon the domain of the other. Broadcasting can do what the gramophone cannot do, and has never presumed to do. It can give us the news of the day from far and near; it can circulate the speeches of the politicians and the sermons of the parsons. It can reproduce the actual opera with its excited atmosphere and its thunderous applause; it can record the actual concert with its air of calmer culture. It can send market quotations to the farmers on lonely acres, and weather warnings to sailors on lonely seas.

These are no mean achievements, yet there are many people to whom, for temperamental reasons, radio would never appeal—people who know what they want, and will not be satisfied merely with what they can get. Radio will on the other hand, always fascinate those who like a sporting chance as to what is going. The majority of people, however, prefer a moderate certainty. They like to have their music to their own ordering and at an hour when they are in the mood for it. These will ever prefer the gramophone, which is always ready and is not subject to the interfering pranks of those atmospheric elves known as “statics.” The instrument is mechanical, comparatively simple; and without any of the complicated batteries, delicately wired mechanisms, and costly and short-lived valves which make up the present-day receiving set.

From the entertaining point of view wireless, as we know it to-day, deals only with things of the moment, with things transitory; it preserves nothing to us. We listen to a broadcasted programme and when it is finished it remains only as a memory. With the gramophone it is different. While it is true that it does not and cannot restore to us the “touch of a vanished hand,” it can and does preserve to us “the sound of a voice that is still”; for when an artist has completed his sojourn on this earth and has crossed over to the green pastures and the still waters, his songs remain with us pure and sweet as on the day on which they were sung, and any instrument that can do that for us will never fail to command its share of admiration and respect.

Comparisons, then, reveal that radio and the gramophone have advantages and disadvantages which belong to themselves. “Both are better and both are worse than the other,” is how the position has been aptly described. The ideal solution of the problem is, therefore, to have both, but if that cannot be, there will always be sufficient people who will be able to see the good in each and declare their individual preference.

THE AUTHOR.

5 Boston Terrace,
Wellington.



A disgruntled sketch of Enrico Caruso on learning about the SRG's silence concerning his nomination as their celebrity for 2009

Professor Archibald's address "Evening Post" 14 March 1891

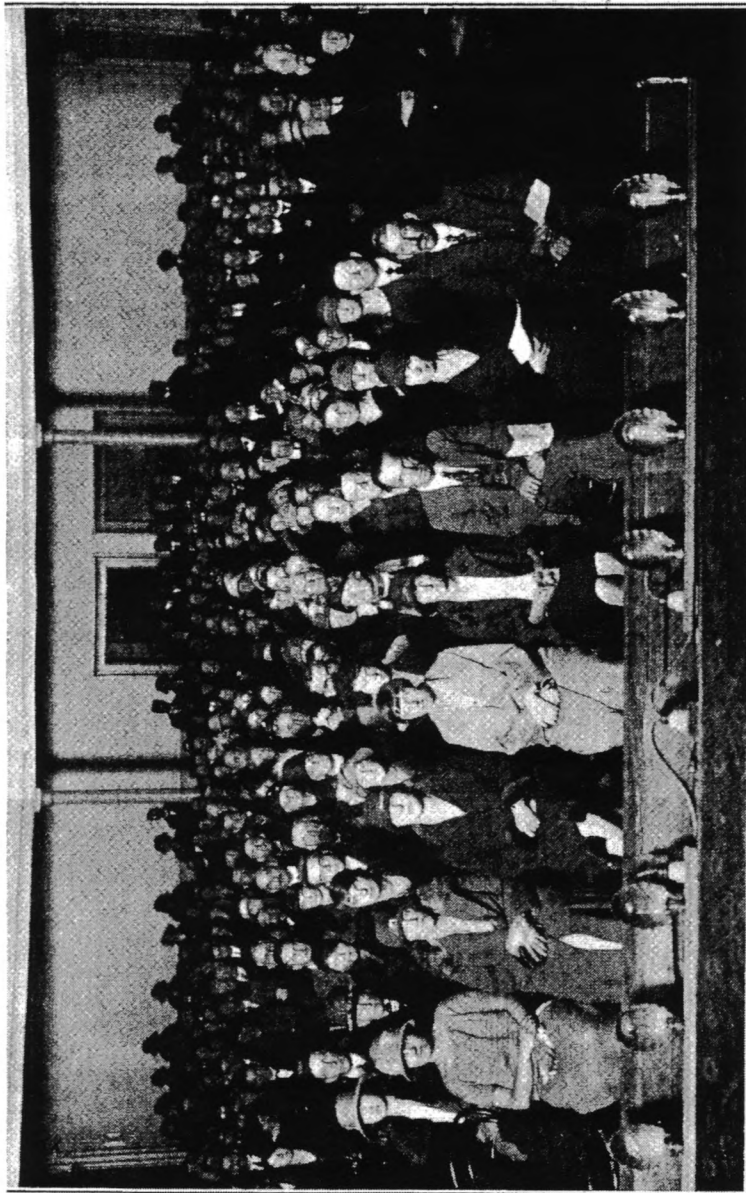
EDISON'S PHONOGRAPH.

It is a long time since the public have so readily "caught on" to any entertainment as they did last night to the Edison phonograph, which was exhibited at the Opera House, for the first time in Wellington under the auspices of Messrs. MacMahon. There was a very large audience, and from the first note sounded by the instrument to the very last display of its capabilities, each item was listened to with bated breath, and an evidently mixed feeling of awe and admiration. Professor Douglas Archibald, M.A., who directs the entertainment, prefaced it with an interesting lecture, couched in a humorous vein, upon the history and structure of the phonograph. As he explained, the mechanism is simplicity itself. The essential parts of the phonograph are merely—(1) the wax cylinder upon which the "record" of the sound waves of the speech or music to be reproduced was originally taken; and (2) a needle which traces the indentations on the surface of the wax, and causes the diaphragm to which it is attached to vibrate, thus giving back to the air the exact waves which were caused in the first instance by the spoken sound. The other apparatus is the motor for turning the cylinder. Where the effects are conveyed direct to the ear, the reproductions are absolutely perfect. In the case of a familiar voice, it seems as though one's friend were talking in his natural tones only three feet away. To make the sounds to be heard throughout so large a building as the Opera House, it was necessary to deliver them through a large funnel. In this way a slightly metallic sound was communicated, which, however, was not marked enough to interfere with the enjoyment of the original sounds. The tones of single instruments, or a complicated collocation of sounds, were all alike to the instrument—each was reproduced with the utmost faithfulness. There was something mysterious—almost uncanny—in an innocent-looking funnel giving forth the voices of men who are 16,000 miles away, and this too

with numerous volumes to fill a whole room. Perhaps the most important item of the programme was the phonogram sent by Mr. Gladstone to Lord Carrington. The sonorous and measured periods of the Grand Old Man were heard admirably, excepting regards one little sentence, the record of which has been obliterated by accident. As an illustration of the way in which the sounds of concerted voices and instruments can be retained there could have been nothing better than the singing and playing of the Christchurch Salvationist with the characteristic ejaculations of the soldiers. So amusing was it that the audience insisted upon an encore. Other instances of the same kind were "The Lord's White Robe," by a Jubilee Coloured Concert Company; a clarinet and piano duet, familiar to playgoers as the music of the Zappelli Ballet in "Fun on the Bristol;" and a selection by an Adelaide band, mainly notable for the vigorous efforts of the trombone and saxhorn men to drown all the other instruments in vocal solos, "The Warrior Bold," sung at Nottingham by Mr. Bingley Shaw in 1889, was the most successful, and received a hearty encore. There were also Mr. R. Walle's "Laughing Song," Mr. Toole's "Orrible Tale" (ending up with the comedian's query, "What do you do?" addressed to Mr. Archibald), "Killaloe," and Mr. Snazelle's "Head Bowed Down," with coughing, interrupting and whistling variations. Solos on the cornet, banjo, coach-horn, tin whistle, and bagpipes were given with fine effect, as well as a speech delivered by Mr. Elliott Bartlett at Hawera. Mr. Robinson, B.M., and Professor Archibald each spoke into the instrument, and their utterances were then as they were reproduced with absolute accuracy, every inflection of the voice being noticeable. An afternoon performance for children being given to-day, and last night's programme will be repeated this evening.



PROFESSOR DOUGLAS ARCHIBALD, M.A., OXFORD. LECTURER ON THE PHONOGRAPH.



A GRAMOPHONE RECITAL IN WELLINGTON, N.Z.

Unfortunately the Gallery, which was equally crowded, was cut out in the process of taking the flashlight.

The *G&T Gazette* is published quarterly 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. All material is copyrighted. Permission to use anything appearing in the *Gazette* must be cleared in the first instance with the editor William (Bill) Main 93 Burma Road, Wellington - 6035 New Zealand. Telephone (04)971-3535, e-mail <wmain@paradise.net.nz> This edition was proof read and edited by Des Wilson.