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Our illustrations in this issue of the G&T Gazette are meant to coincide with a talk which I will host at my meeting in July with the author Clare Gleeson. I'm sure that when she does publish her research on the firm of Begg's she will have no trouble in obtaining illustrations from many sources. So to get our foot in the door I've provided a few which I think will interest our members. One on the back cover will cause some head scratching if you didn't attend Jan & Bob's meeting in February when Jan played the Rimutaka Waltz on the piano for us. The record packet above poses more questions than answers and I hope it will cause some debate in our circle, especially dating, which some say was in use around 1910-1912? I'd especially draw your attention to the double sided Fonotopia Grand Opera recordings. If this isn't a poke in the eye for HMV prices, I'll go for it! Finally on the back cover the cover design of Maurice Hurst's 1945 book "Music and the Stage in New Zealand". Can anyone tell us anything about Mansell's Gramophone attachment?

Tell

Since the last issue which confronted the question, "What are you going to do with your records", before you get a call from the great collector in the sky, I have made a start in a small way by gifting a small but select portion of my record collection to someone who spoke out about their interest and admiration of a certain tenor at our February meeting. Knowing it won't take long for this to be known in our group, let me set the record straight. It only involved 13 records and therefore it wasn't a wholesale sell out. Far from it, but like another member in our SRG who has whittled away at his collection now for some years now doing exactly the same thing, I wish I'd begun this operation years ago.

Now before there is a wild clamour from all and sundry, it's not a move to rid myself of my obligations but rather it's a judicious deployment of records in my collection which I never play. Conversely, I've just sent off bids to two dealers in America for some records I'd like to add to my collection. So if that doesn't contradict my recent gesture of deleting items, then I don't know what is!

Temporarily lifting my attention away from the local scene in this issue, which means a cessation to 'Collectors I have known' for a while I have resolved to send Larry Lustig, editor of *The Record Collector*, a submission for his Desert Island series. This has come about after it was launched some years ago when it became apparent that the magazine was looking to improve its service to subscribers. My first reaction to contribute a list was dampened by the editorial request to look for the unfamiliar rather than trotting out the old tried and proven items which we all have in our collections. This amazed me despite the fact that it could usher in broader horizons for the readership. With the passage of time and the fact that I think it would be good to have an antipodean voice in this forum, has finally led to me choosing eight recordings which are set out on another page. Naturally, your comments are very welcome!

It is my great pleasure to introduce a guest contributor to this issue of the *Gazette*. After a friend passed on an article to me from the *NZ Genealogist*, I wrote Clare Gleeson and asked her permission to reprint it in our journal. She agreed and hopes to come and give us a talk at the July meeting. Her story begins on the opposite page. In anticipation that she will be able to join us in July, I would ask members to keep an eye open for interesting material with a Beggs connection and bring it to my meeting in July.

Bill Main

Clare Gleeson's Charles Begg & Co - A work in Progress!

Growing up in Wellington in the 1960s and 1970s, I was occasionally asked if I had any connection to the music shop with the same name in Manners Street. I always found the answer a difficult one, knowing that my forebears had established the business, but that my family did not own it.

However, my father did import music and musical instruments - it all seemed very complicated.

By the time I left primary school, the Beggs shops were all owned individually. Charles Begg and Company Ltd had been broken up and that seemed the end of it (although with the shop retaining the name, the questions still came occasionally).

As I got older and studied history, my interest grew and I began to wonder where exactly Begg's did fit in within the musical life of New Zealand. Finally, about two years ago, I decided not to defer any longer and begin what seemed a somewhat daunting project - to write a history of Charles Begg & Co Ltd and establish its importance to the musical, cultural and social life of New Zealand during the period of its existence, from 1861 to 1970.

I wanted to know for myself, but I also wanted to provide a record for family, my children and nephew and nieces of exactly where and how Begg's fitted in.

And so my quest began and what a fascinating one it has been. I have haunted the Turnbull and Hocken libraries, made a nuisance of myself to archivists and librarians throughout New Zealand, the UK,

Australia and the USA, scoured business directories, newspapers, programmes, correspondence and countless archives. I have tried to locate every original piece of music Begg's published, to identify the huge variety of instruments and other goods they sold and see as many examples of these as possible.

I have always found old photographs fascinating and have tried to locate photographs of shops, employees, and performers. I have travelled to Scotland to see where it all began, and throughout New Zealand looking at places Begg's had branches or agencies and interviewing past employees.

My initial approach was to gather all the information I could find and then work through it to write up the history chronologically. No business archives, as such, existed for Begg's and so my research had to be more far-reaching, looking at peripheral materials, such as those mentioned above. As I progressed I realised what a huge task this is, particularly for the last 50 years of the company's existence when it was so large and diverse. I am also conscious of the fact that no matter how much information I gather, there will be things I will have to leave out, simply because I am not aware of them. I do feel, however, that I am beginning to form a fairly good idea of Begg's place in the community and what it meant to people. Of course there is endless detail to fill in - I am still researching the period from 1926 onwards in depth - but the story I have discovered so far has been fascinating. There have been heroes

and villains, family feuds, strong and weak managers, sound business acumen and the odd failed enterprise, loyalty, commitment, initiative, humour and above all, music.

There are so many interesting personalities and stories that one book could never cover them all and I am very grateful to all the people who have helped and shared their memories with me,

Even though it may seem somewhat obvious, no business can exist without people, and this is what I have found most intriguing - the importance of people to the business, be they family, staff, composers, musicians, customers or the New Zealand public.

Although initially this was to be a business history, even without the familial link I would have found the personalities involved irresistible and they will become an important part of the story.

One outstanding example of this is Charles Begg's widow, Jessie. Charles himself died in 1874, only 13 years after arriving in New Zealand. Although the company always retained his name, Jessie Begg is one of the two heroes of Begg's story, the other being her grandson, Eric.

Widowed at 42, Jessie was left with seven children, the youngest only one year old, and a business that was not particularly robust, but which was their only means of livelihood. Over the next 40 years, she raised and educated her children, for a time ran a boardinghouse (presumably to augment their income) and all this while she managed and expanded the company.

Her sons took over the management in 1896, but Jessie remained on the board until her death in 1914, by which time the company had branches in Dunedin, Timaru, Wellington, Invercargill, Oamaru and Nelson and an office in London. This amazing woman can be seen in a photograph of a

staff picnic c 1911, surrounded by members of Begg's Dunedin staff and their families.

A group of people I have found particularly fascinating are the agents who acted for Begg's. I have discovered branches and agencies for Begg's literally everywhere in New Zealand from 1875 onwards. The branches are interesting microcosms of the company but the agencies, particularly in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries are a fascinating insight into the life of small communities. Agents came and went; some, like Mr E G Johnstone in Milton, were agents for many years, while in Ashburton the agency changed every couple of years or so.

The agents themselves are intriguing. One of my favourites is that of S R Burr, "The Cash Grocer" in Foxton, who in his 1900 advertisement boasts "Agent for Begg & Co. pianos" and underneath "Poultry and Eggs bought". Agents were cabinetmakers, watchmakers, newspaper agencies, drapers, jewellers, music teachers - virtually any type of business that Begg's thought would represent them well. Music was such an integral part of every community that it was unthinkable that you might not be able to buy the latest sheet music locally, or purchase a piano or other musical instrument as you desired.

Of course, the staff were a vital part of Begg's success. Many people served their entire working lives with Begg's and I think I can confidently say that no-one served longer than Jimmie Flyburg. He joined the company in 1891 at the tender age of 11 and was still working there when he died 67 years later. His name was synonymous with music and Begg's in Dunedin. There were lots of others as well and I hesitate to list them, as I know there will be omissions, but for those who worked in Wellington, who could not have heard of Pinkie Mears, sec-

retary to the managers there and "loved by everyone", as I have often been told. Walter Sinton was Begg's Dunedin for many people and quite literally everyone I have spoken to in Dunedin about Begg's has said to me "you must speak to the Gardiners" (Joan and Margaret), which of course I have done.

The composers of the original compositions that Begg's published could justify a book in themselves. Initially, of course, they were immigrants and many of these were already highly successful musicians, and sometimes composers, overseas before coming to New Zealand, often only spending a few years here before moving on again. They eagerly embraced their new home and such compositions as *Dunedin Polka*, *Zealandia March* and *Mataura Waltz* were early forerunners to the *Nikau Waltz* and *Haera Ra* of later years.

These, often larger-than-life, personalities were of all nationalities German, American, French, Australian, Italian as well as British. Later there were New Zealand-born composers such as Alf Pettitt, Ruru Karaitiana and many, many more.

And where would Begg's have been without musicians - professional and amateur, young and old, eager and reluctant - they all contributed to the success that the business enjoyed. Most of the staff were musicians themselves - the "girls" selling sheet music had to be able to play a piece for a customer to see if they liked it and those selling instruments were usually involved in musical groups after working hours. Begg's was a meeting place for a town's musicians - the phrase "meet me at

Begg's" has cropped up often in the interviews I have conducted.

As for the customers - those eager for the latest tunes in sheet music, keen to hear Caruso singing on the new invention, the phonograph; those needing a reed for their clarinet or string for their violin. There were many characters among them - in Auckland the gentleman who used to come in and pretend he was a virtuoso pianist on one of the grand pianos, sweeping the staid Begg's accountant into a waltz when he asked him to desist; in Wellington the composer who was the only one who ever bought a copy of his own composition, but bought one regularly; in Dunedin the opinionated music teacher who literally became wedged upside down between two pianos while examining the back of one of them and in the process displayed her red undergarments.

All these I have heard about from past employees and I am so grateful to them for their memories. They make Begg's the business come alive and after all that is what it was - a living and vital part of New Zealand society. To the many people who have responded to my request for memories and information through this journal, thank you. I am so grateful for the contacts made, photographs sent and memories told. I still have a lot to cover and would welcome any more information any reader has - it all adds to the fabric and colour of the patchwork that was Begg's.

Clare Gleeson (nee Begg), 43 Simla Crescent, Khandallah, Wellington 6035
Phone 04 479 2554 Email: beggs @inspire.net.nz

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This large back cover Begg's advertisement appeared in the Christmas 1945 edition of the *New Zealand Free Lance*. Amongst other things it carries an illustration of Maurice Hurst's publication. It is an interesting book and lists artists that visited New Zealand going back to the 1840s. Begg's were very brave venturing into the book trade with this ground breaking publication and it is worth keeping an eye open in second hand bookshops to add it to your library. I have never seen a copy of *Music in Dunedin*. If anyone has a copy I would love to borrow it!

The story behind *The Record Collector* DESERT ISLAND DISCS

The Desert Island Discs series first appeared in the March 2007 *Record Collector*. Since then 25 collectors, including people like Tully Potter, John Hughes and Michael Aspinall have contributed their choice for readers to pore over. This is how the editor Larry Lustig issued the challenge to his readers.

“Suppose you were stranded on the eponymous Desert Island and could take only eight records with you? What would they be? I have asked regular contributors to *The Record Collector* and well known collectors precisely that. In the new series they explain the reason for their choices. I suggested that, whenever possible, contributors should avoid the most famous names as their recordings are already likely to be well known to collectors. The object of these articles is to bring to our attention those great recordings one may have missed, by singers other than the most celebrated”.

My reaction to the editor's codicils and the bearing they have been aired elsewhere in this issue. Sometimes there have been esoteric selections which leave me bewildered and confused, with unknown artists and music. In this situation it has been impossible to get access to either in order to form an opinion. Countering this negativity, there have been some pearls of wisdom in the form of comments justifying a number of preferences or why a particular artist or selection has been chosen.

Despite these drawbacks, it has been interesting to note how many times more popular artists get listed. John McCormack and Enrico Caruso have appeared at least twice despite Larry's urging. Sadly, there has been no established pattern of presentation, with an agile mind required to fill in gaps by some authors when supplying details of recordings.

That aside it has brought to light a lot of interesting material which otherwise would never have made it into the lime-light.

Taking all this on board, my selection of eight recordings for a Desert Island list took me a couple of sessions to decide. For a start, I re-read all the articles which have already appeared. This automatically knocked out a couple of my original choice items. Then it began to formulate into how many male vs. female artists should I select? Four men and four women surely would be acceptable - but then I don't know about the political correctness of this because some collectors I know have a leaning to one or the other.

In the end, I think I've done a fairly good job, picking three or four of my definite favourites along with some 'left field' selections - to use an American baseball expression. Before I tidy it up and forward it to Larry Lustig, I would be grateful for any comments from members of the SRG.

Leoncavallo: Prologue, Pagliacci. Peter Dawson - baritone with orchestra.

HMV C.1259 Recorded 31 December 1925

My reason for choosing the Prologue from Pagliacci was simple. If I were marooned on a desert island and had the means of playing my eight recordings in a single session, I would naturally see it as a special treat and of course dress for the occasion to keep my spirits up. Therefore, what better than 'Ring up the curtain' and let the drama unfold. Like many collectors, I have several versions of the Prologue from Pagliacci in my collection with Thomas Chalmers sharing the other English version I have, while Basiola, Stracciari and Scotti sing it in its native tongue with Schlusnus doing it in German. I'm sure I have many more on LP and CD recitals but have never bothered to list these with my 78s. While I've always enjoyed **Peter Dawson** in everything he sang for the gramophone, I feel I have a duty in selecting him over others on this occasion. Perhaps it's because I don't play him as much as I should or it's just a part of the NZ-Aussie relationship bit. The highest tribute I can pay him is to say I know his voice so well that I only have to close my eyes and I can hear him without bothering to put any record by him on my turntable. However in this instance, this verismo gem sets the scene well for my programme.

Giordani: Caro mio ben Giuseppe de Luca - baritone with Pietro Cimara piano.

Brunswick AXL 2007. Recorded N.Y. 1947

I bought this recording of **Giuseppe de Luca** within a year or so of starting up my record collection in the mid 1950s. Like the Dawson, it's so well played by me that it automatically makes my list, especially the way de Luca handles sustained passages which test his abilities as a seventy year old by slowing the tempo ever so slightly to allow him to complete a phrase without slurring the notes. I admit I'm a fan of singers who have reached their prime but are prepared to adjust their vocal techniques to enable them to continue singing. In some respects I think it presents a challenge to reinvent themselves a little in order to cope with the situation and at the same time give a lesson to those who get great satisfaction from listening to phrasing and voice control. *Caro mio ben* is a simple song. Therein lies its test to interpret and deliver. It is very deceiving in its simplicity. I have never heard another version to better de Luca's interpretation.

Pergolesi: Tre giorni son che Nina. Maria Labia - soprano with piano.

Edison Diamond Disc 82037. Recorded 1911.

When I began to formulate a short list of possible recordings to uphold *The Record Collector* editor's desire to see records chosen which stand out from the norm, I immediately began to think of my Edison holdings. It has always been an established fact that his method of recording was the best against all the various acoustic systems that vied with one another until the advent of electrical recording. Accordingly, we shouldn't take exception to the fact that Edison was more interested in making commercial gain from his invention through dictaphones than perfecting music in the home for many years. Therefore, when a singer like the dramatic soprano **Maria Labia** comes along and makes records that match Muzio's Edisons for quality and interesting titles, we who hold out hope for his products are inclined to over enthuse slightly. So it is that by good fortune rather than deliberate choice that I have acquired some Edison records by singers which are a

joy to listen to with the voice well placed in relation to the recording horn and beautifully captured. I choose the Pergolesi over Tosti's *Seconda Mattinata* which backs this disc and Puccini's *Non la sospiri* (Tosca) because of its melody which suits Labia's dramatic abilities down to the ground with a wonderful control of light and shade expressing the rather plaintive "Song of Nina"

Trad. (arr. Hughes) Star of the County Down, John McCormack - ten. with Gerald Moore piano. HMV DA 1718 Recorded 30 November 1939

The next recording I've chosen is one which my wife and I have treasured for all the time we've been together. It's **McCormack** singing Herbert Hughes arrangement of the traditional song, 'The Star of the County Down'. This is really a true Desert Island disc in every sense of the phrase. It bubbles over with words and music taking you to an Irish Fair where a beautifully enunciated courtship and romance takes place. I doubt if you can keep your feet still when listening to this recording! One point I'd like to mention regarding this selection is that McCormack seems to be comfortably ahead by popular choice with at least two if not three other Desert Island collectors choosing him as one of their artists!

Fraser-Simson: Love will find a way, Maid of the Mountains. Gladys Moncrieff - sop. with orch. Vocalion S-102. Rec. 1926

Carrying on in a lighter vein I couldn't resist the urge to take this opportunity of introducing collectors around the world to one of the best kept secrets of collecting records in 'down under' in the form of the soprano **Gladys Moncrieff**. While some might demur the inclusion of a queen of musical comedy between the two World Wars, she could more than hold her own internationally before settling permanently in Australia. After a successful spell in London where she made recordings for Vocalion, she returned to Australia and immediately took over the lead roles in *Maid of the Mountains* and *Rio Rita*. Her dominance in these roles was such that she never had any reason to consider seeking fame and fortune beyond her own shores. 'Our Glad', as she was affectionately known, was idolised in Australia and New Zealand, with her concerts selling out whenever she appeared. Once she'd settled back in Australia she was taken up by Columbia where she made over a 100 titles.

Hughes & Cui: (a) My father has some very fine sheep. (b) Romance. Vladimir Rosing. tenor with Ivor Newtown piano. Parlophone A 4432 rec.23 February 1934

This particular recording by **Vladimir Rosing**, has been a touchstone for me over the years when presenting programmes to friends and fellow collectors. The novelty of the Hughes 'My father has some very fine sheep' with animal imitations opens the door to an attentive audience and makes them listen keenly to the Cui 'Romance' which follows on the same side. This record gives us some indication of one of the most amazing individuals ever to carve out a career for himself on the operatic stage and concert platform. For reasons which can not be explained, his records sold well in Australasia, with the Parlophone company pressing them in the mid to late 1930s for the local market.

Loewe: Tom der Reimer, Heinrich Schlusnus - baritone with Sebastien Peschko piano

Polydor 67212 recorded 1938

For some years now I've been an avid collector of Carl Loewe ballads. This has led me down many paths where I occasionally have had good reason to take account of my insatiable passion. Therefore it is no surprise to learn I have over a dozen versions of one of Loewe's best known songs, 'Tom der Reimer'. When I conducted some research on other collectors' selections by reading back issues of *The Record Collector*, I noted that one had already nominated Slezak's 'Tom' in his selection! While I have a lot of time for Slezak, I think in this case he drags it out so much to see it spread over two sides. My favourite version is by **Heinrich Schlusnus**. As the 14th century Scottish tale unfolds the Fairy Queen of Elfland warns Tom that if he kisses her, he will be her servant for seven years, a challenge which he never lived to regret it seems! How I wish someone would set about writing more modern English translations for this ballads.

J.Strauss: Voci di Primavera. Marcella Sembrich - soprano with piano.

Primo P.1001 recorded in New York by Gianni Bettini 1900-1901.

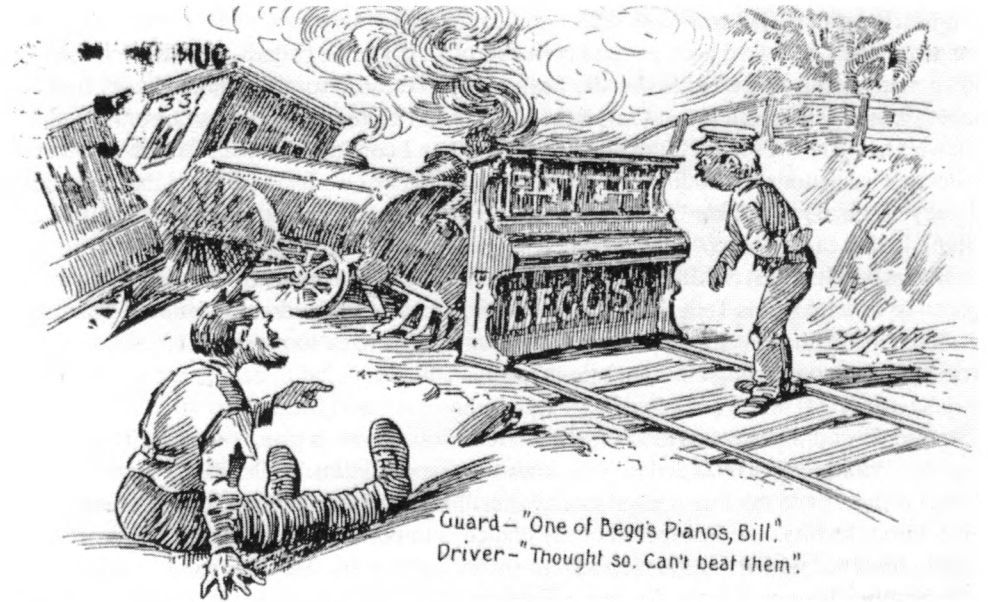
Which brings me to my final Desert Island Disc. I hope my gramophone on the Island will have 45rpm facility. The last record of my choice is important to me because I was personally involved with its production as a re-recording in 1965. This is a recording of **Marcella Sembrich** singing Strauss's 'Voce di Primavera'. This transcription of a five inch brown wax cylindrical recording is a saga which is covered in *The Record Collector* for September 1965. When I play it today I naturally wonder what Marston would do to it in comparison to my very basic attempts 45 years ago I ventured to a Canterbury farm in the South Island to make a copy of this record. I used a top of the range (for those days) very heavy Ferrograph tape recorder along with a stereo cartridge on a long pick-up arm which was mounted on another cylinder playing machine to track the hill & dale cartridge across the cylinder. The resulting tape was eventually put onto a variable speed tape recorder by courtesy of the N.Z. Broadcasting Corporation in Wellington and pitched to the same song sung by Sembrich from the 1903 Columbia Grand Opera series. Despite the impromptu nature of the whole operation and along with retailing 400 copies of it around the world on the Primo Label, the effort impressed John Freestone in *The Gramophone* so much that he gave it a Bronze for the years recordings - historical re-issues category, an honour I and my fellow directors on Primo Records dined out on for many years.

WANTED

A good home for a collection of Dance and Jazz recordings, ex the Ray Harris collection. These number over 100 78rpm 10inch discs which were made from the late 1940s to the end of the shellac period in the late 1950s.

Also I'm quitting a several recordings by the Scottish tenor Alfred Hislop. Inspection invited by interested parties.

Editor



Guard - "One of Begg's Pianos, Bill."
 Driver - "Thought so. Can't beat them!"

Rimutaka Waltz

BY CHARLES WOODLEY.

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