

# G&T GAZETTE

Established 1995. Incorporating the *Edison Echo*

April/May June

2012



During the next few weeks limited supplies of this magnificent instrument will be available from Pye dealers. If you experience any difficulty in obtaining the Black Box, we will be delighted to make special arrangements for you to hear this instrument at some place convenient to your home.

**HIGH FIDELITY**—The Pye Black Box is the first High Fidelity instrument of its kind to be marketed in Great Britain. High Fidelity reproduction, simply stated, means that the listener hears through his instrument exactly what was created in the concert hall. This refers both to range and quality of tone. The Black Box with twin-speakers plays all speeds of records and changes them automatically. If you are interested in further details we will gladly send a copy of our eight page illustrated brochure.

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P Y E L I M I T E D · C A M B R I D G E · E N G L A N D

Turn to page seven for the lowdown on the “Magic” of a PYE Black Box.

Dear Bill Main,

Many thanks for the 2 copies of the G&T Gazette including the bits about Clara Butt. I couldn't believe that I had written all that. I'm very pleased for you to be making use of it - one publishing seems so little for so many of these articles.

I was intrigued by the 2 photos of Clara in N Z - and the fact of one being discovered in a deserted house is quite amazing. The query of who the other people are/were reminds me of a friend who, researching Madame Clementine de Vere-Sapio the soprano, received a large photo from the Metropolitan Opera house with 4 Europeans in rickshaw-like carriages, obviously in South Africa somewhere with all the local natives around and not a jot of information about who, where or when!

Years ago I met a N Z Methodist Minister over here at a record fair, he was another vocal collector and was trying to get all the 78s by N Z artists as the basis of a N Z national collection. He had a Norah d'Argel 10inch black HMV from me, a duet with William Samuel, I cannot recall if there were others. It is about 40 years ago! Did he succeed in setting up such a collection, do you know ?

The other thing that might interest you was that I wrote a book for private satisfaction about a Nottinghamshire born opera singer, that's my county, called J W Turner; he sang with Royal Carl Rosa in the very early days and ran his own opera company in the UK between 1886 and 1913, the co finished during WW I. As a young man he toured the Far East visiting China, Phillipines and Australia - starting with a group of minstrels (as a 21 year old - or thereabouts) and maybe getting to Oz by himself. Operatic debut in Melbourne in the early 1860's (speaking from memory on dates here as the book is not beside the computer). In Carl Rosa days sang with Santley and at the same time as Joseph Maas. The N Z part is that he had a brother, another tenor; Charles Turner went to the USA to make his fortune. Met and married Annie Montague, a Hawaii born soprano, and later together they honeymooned in Oz and kept an eye out for singing work. This they encountered and for several years ran the Montague-Turner English Opera Co which performed in both Oz and N Z, Unfortunately Charles developed a chest infection and tried to sing on but died in N Z, 11th July 1894 in Auckland. Alison Guger mentions them in her book about opera in Australia.

Too early for 78's of course but its amazing how these people got about.

Yours faithfully

Dennis Foreman

## DAME CLARA BUTT

by Dennis Foreman

Part 2 as originally printed in **THE RECORD COLLECTOR** Volume 44 No.2 June 1999

In Ponder's book she notes that contrary to Nellie Melba's advice to 'sing 'em muck' in Australia, they did indeed perform Giordani, Brahms, Handel, Bach, Gluck, Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, Grieg, Wolf and Richard Strauss, but the old ballads as well. A private trip of Clara's to India in 1927 resulted in her having to give three very successful concerts at popular request. *The Times* noted that the visit to Europe in 1912 included a concert in Berlin and another in Vienna. The Viennese recital, their first joint appearance there, was a 'marked success'. The classical songs were 'creditably, though not perfectly, rendered'. However, she is reported to have 'conquered the public with songs from Elgar's Sea Pictures and by Leoni's The leaves and the wind. The latter song she was obliged to repeat.

At a Farewell Concert in Melbourne, 1 October 1925 she sang *Ombra mai fu, Creations Hymn. Where the mind is without fear, A fairy went a-marketing, Yonder* and the duet *Love has come to stay* (Torens). The encores are unknown.

An enlightening chapter entitled *Clara and Kennerley*, is included in Claude Kingston's book *It don't seem a day too soon*. Kingston was their tour manager in Australia and New Zealand in 1921 and 1926, being the representative of the J. C Williamson Co. the famous Australian impresarios. Briefly he says, 'They charmed me from the first. Neither had any of those overbearing airs which some celebrity artists give themselves ... Clara Butt had superb platform sense. A tall massive woman, she was queenly but never awesome, she was far too warm and spontaneous to be that.' He tells of an incident in an Adelaide Town Hall concert when a baby started crying. Clara stopped in mid-song, asked the mother to bring the child to her on the platform, cradled the baby, who promptly stopped crying, restarted *Have you seen my boy Jack?* and, after a rolling thunder of applause, returned the child to its mother. Their second tour with Kingston in 1926 was less harmonious, being an example of anxiety the of artists when feeling threatened. Their Australian personal business manager for the tour, a man whom Kingston had superseded in the firm five years previously, was a man whom he thought caused unnecessary trouble. The Rumfords were now a little past their prime, their supporting pianist, Marie Aussenac, was too good - she was a superb pianist - and the business manager, in Kingston's mind, had created problems. A running skirmish lasted most of the tour with the Rumfords trying to get rid of their pianist and Kingston supporting her as a contracted artist. The tour was a success and all ended on a reasonably friendly tone, but his account illustrates the concerns of older artists.

I said at the beginning that she was popular and the various reviews reiterate this from as early as 1896. The basis of this love affair with her public must have been her choice of material. She gave them what they wanted (if not quite much), especially in the early years. In a Jingoist, imperialist age she provided the right vocal fare. The 'song-plugging' business did not begin with rock-and-roll, her ballad concerts including a good number of royalty numbers. She had a fine striking appearance and suited the current taste whether in youth or maturity. Or singing Rule Britannia dressed up for the part at a Promenade concert. Her records sold exceedingly well and suited all tastes. A final example of her longevity is her presence as 'the singer' in the Madame Tussaud's waxworks exhibition of a 'Society Evening' at Warwick Castle.

What of the woman herself? Tall, quoted as 6ft. 2-in. (1.9 m) high, she made a fine figure on the concert platform. At the beginning of her career, being slender and with attractive features, she is said to have epitomised the late Victorian ideals of femininity. We are told that George du Maurier, the playwright, modelled his character of Trtlby upon her singing-stance: "head thrown

Maurier, the playwright, modelled his character of *Trilby* upon her singing stance “head thrown back, and one foot advanced”. Indeed Herbert Tree wished to engage her to sing the Chopin *Impromptu* from the wings for the actress playing the part, but to no avail, Clara was still a student. Taken up by society ladies in her youth she remained on excellent terms with them and seems to have been accepted into their fold, as she had with members of the Royal families of Britain and Germany. Ponder states that she had a weak heart. This may account for the bouts of fainting in her youth and occasional reports of her health breaking down through overwork. A strong-willed personality is apparent. A devout Christian Scientist, she took part in revivalist meetings, singing and even preaching sermons, her beliefs being reflected in the many hymn-like songs she loved to sing and record. As another aspect of her personality she recorded her recreations as riding, driving and fishing.

Vocally she had an exceptional range and power: from C below middle C to high B flat, it was almost three octaves. A true contralto with a clear pure tone of great beauty without the plumminess common to many British singers, seeming to have two different registers: a warm baritone bottom, vast and powerful, and a lighter toned pure top, and a gear change between. She exhibits complete vocal control, superb legato and an enviable clarity of enunciation. There is also a delicacy of touch in some of her songs that is truly amazing, whilst the coloratura of items like the *Lucrezia Borgia* aria is thrown off with ease. The coming of electrical recordings shows a deterioration in the upper range and by the 1930's the voice seems bigger, darker and the gear change more exaggerated.

Clara made her first gramophone record in 1899, one title for Berliner. But it was not until 1909, when she was in her prime, that her Gramophone Co. records started to come out. It will be seen that there is a considerable number of rejects in her sessions. Indeed she had a reputation of being ‘a rather difficult personality. She broke with them in 1915 owing to a contractual disagreement over withheld royalties: a dispute that originated in 1912 and rumbled on until 1919. The dispute seems to have been to do with a reduction in royalties owing to an unaltered price structure for some of her recordings. Her Gramophone Co. contract was up for renewal in 1915 but she did not feel inclined to sign, to remake any records, or to have anything to do with the company again. Despite this she made three titles on 2 March 1915 when her contract had expired. Columbia, the opposition, had approached her by 27 April of that year and she signed a contract with them on 17 June 1915. By this time she was formally in dispute with the Gramophone Co., her solicitor and her accountant! For unknown reasons the Company acquiesced to her demands and paid the royalties together with those that were previously unpaid. Probably the Company decided that while they were legally correct, their actions had been contrary to the real intention of the parties to the contract. A rapprochement must have occurred when one considers the 1917 private recording of ‘Miss Cameron’, a spoken message preceding the song *A Perfect Day*, all in the unmistakable tones of Clara Butt, a Columbia recording artist at the time. Having moved to Columbia she recorded with them until 1933, both acoustically and electrically, at recording studios, Christ Church, Central Hall, Westminster, the Crystal Palace, Hyde Park and at home. When she was confined to a wheel-chair the engineers went to the Rumfords’ home and set up facilities there.

I will not comment upon the records, leaving that to someone better qualified. but

must say that some of the very late recordings are sung with such an intense pathos that the tears in the voice are in the listener’s eyes. W.J. Henderson, the well-known American critic, said she was ‘the greatest contralto voice since Marietta Alboni’, whereas the exquisite Reynaldo Hahn called it ‘une voix obscure’. We all have our own opinions.

The twenties were the early years of broadcasting and in common with many others she was excited by the concept. The thought of her voice reaching people so far away really appealed to her. She opened one B.B.C. radio station at Chelmsford in 1924 and made several broadcasts.

In later life she was dogged by tragedy and ill-health. In September 1923, just a few weeks before they sailed to America, her elder son Roy died of meningitis. In the 1920's she is reported as suffering from sciatica and was often restricted to a wheel-chair even when recording. However, she must later have been in good enough health to undertake what was one of her last major tours. to Japan. In February 1931, she, her husband and her accompanist, Miss S Murrey, gave joint recitals in Tokyo (8 February); Nagoya (15 February); again in Tokyo (16 February) and Kobe (20 February). During this tour she recorded four sides for Japanese Columbia. These discs are now of great rarity, even in Japan.

Later, in 1931, in her late 50's she suffered an accident to her spine and henceforth fought a heroic battle against ill-health.

In January 1933, while living at Roquebrune near Monte Carlo, possibly recuperating, she underwent an operation, returning the following March to her home at North Stoke, Oxfordshire. On tour in Australia, in the Spring of 1934, she again became very ill and was carried on a stretcher to the boat that returned her to England. In June of that year, when she was very ill and undergoing treatment at Guy's Hospital, the news that her second son, Victor, who was engaged in farming, had died by his own hand in Salisbury, Rhodesia was withheld from her, for a time. The next year she went to Germany for treatment, from which she derived great benefit, but returned to North Stoke by ambulance. She died of cancer of the spine on 23 January 1936, in the same week as Rudyard Kipling, the imperial poet and novelist, and King George V.

And what happened to Rumford? He remarried in 1942, to Miss Dorothy Jane Elwin, and lived on at Brook Lodge, North Stoke, until his death on 9 March, 1957.

Finally, two contemporary items that relate directly to Clara Butt and her thoughts on singing. The first is her own words from an article *Music of all Nations* from the 1920's:

‘I wish to emphasise the fact that the true English style is that of the minstrel school, which I take to mean the ability to render a simple song or ballad with directness and sincerity, an ability distinct and very different from that of the average opera singer, to whom the art that conceals is not of much use ... The English style is perhaps more lyrical than dramatic, . . . This is how she sang’.

The second is from her obituary in *The Times* of Friday 24 January 1936:

A great career was prophesied for her, and the prophecy was fulfilled, though, as frequently happens, not exactly in the way the prophets had imagined. True the Albert Hall oratorios, the Handel Festivals at Crystal Palace, the great provincial Festivals of Leeds, Birmingham and Norwich hastened to secure her for their contralto parts, and her

singing of *He was despised* and *O rest in the Lord*, particularly the last named, became the delight of all that great majority to whom simple melody delivered by a glorious voice is the highest good that music affords.

Clara Butt was herself of that faith. She was not eager to learn new roles, to participate in the complex ensembles of modern composers. She was even possibly suspicious of an intellectual outlook toward singers' art, was certainly from the first inclined to be impatient of technical study of the more advanced kind and saw no reason why, since she could move vast audiences by her singing of a simple ballad or of *Abide with me*. She could exert herself to make them listen to music which they might not like equally well. So she developed a repertoire of her own which included a few samples of the classics, such as Gluck's *Divinites du Styx*, some of the more directly melodious of the German Lieder, and a number of English songs of the kind known as 'royalty ballads'. Many of which were written for her, and this repertoire she carried triumphantly throughout the English speaking world with what success all but the youngest of music lovers of today will recall.

Her appeal to the public was by no means only a matter of vocal volume and quality. She had a personality that can make a song an intimate communication to the hearer. It was said she could pit her voice against the full power of the Albert Hall organ in the last verse of *The Lost Chord* and she gave that impression and she could even croon a lullaby in a way to put a baby to sleep in the furthest gallery. Not only the voice carried but the expressive intention carried with it. That is why it mattered so little to her public what she sang or even how she sang it. All that mattered was that she sang



## MONORAL REVIVAL IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE SRG!

*I have recently joined Des Wilson\* in turning my back on my stereophonic amplifier for reproducing vinyl and CD recordings for a PYE Black Box. This came about when I did a trade-off with Rod Cornelius in Auckland with an Edison/Bettini Home Phonograph which came from the large collection I purchased with Max Borra. While Rod had gifted me a Mahogany Pye Hi Fi years ago, it had never performed properly and I could not resist the temptation to obtain the more sophisticated (in appearance only) of the so called 'Black Box'. Rod I know had two of these and it was something of a triumph when he finally agreed to letting one of his 'Black Boxes' go with this deal. However, it was unfortunately back to square one with the machine I received not responding to anything resembling a good performance. Fortunately, I was able to interest another of our members in helping me out with a few technicalities. Neil MacDonald came to my aid and together ( I held the torch while his soldering iron got to work on one or two connections) I now have a machine that performs marvellously and I stack up records on the auto-changer for an evening cocktail session!*

March 1954 literature released by the PYE company in **THE GRAMOPHONE** and downloaded from the internet.

"The pianist, the orchestra, the singers are still with you. And there's a magician there too. A modern, up to the minute scientific machine. That's the new Pye "Black Box," the most exciting magical development in the history of music".

### Positioning the "Black Box"

Four special loud speakers are used in order to obtain a more uniform distribution of sound, to which end the proper positioning- of the "Black Box" in the room helps, for when place across the corner of the room, reflection from the wall surfaces produces a more uniform distribution of sound. You will then hear every instrument and every voice, from the lowest note to the highest, with lifelike quality and clarity. If no corner is available, place the "Black Box" at an angle to a hard wall. The cabinet is robustly constructed in order to be free of audible resonances, and is so designed as to enable the loudspeakers to function in the best manner. With the lid closed the cabinet forms an acoustic chamber in which the loudspeakers can function properly, and give- the extended frequency range necessary to recreate the original programme.

The four loudspeakers are specially designed high-quality components accurately placed in the cabinet to produce non-directional, room filling sound. Loudspeakers and cabinet work together as matched, integral parts of a system reproducing lifelike sound.

The amplifier, which feeds the loudspeakers through a high quality output transformer, embodies 3 valves, which give the performance of an amplifier having 6 valves. They are (1) Pre-amplifier / Phase inverter, (2) Voltage Amplifier, (3) Push-Pull output. Overall negative and positive feedback is used in the amplifier. It reproduces the whole audio frequency range with the minimum of distortion.

### Controls

There are three controls: treble, bass and loudness. It is important that you adjust these controls with care. for different rooms and different records necessitate differences in the required settings. A little experiment will soon enable you to make the correct adjustments.

This instrument is fitted with a 4-speed record changer capable of playing mixed records, the motor having very low "wow" and "rumble." It is equipped with the latest type of turnover pick-up giving high quality reproduction with minimum record wear and maximum stylus life.

**Look forward to my meeting in November when I'll be demonstrating this 1954 'wonder'.**

\* Des's equipment is a Japanese Dynavector mono cartridge for playing LP's and 45's.



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Members of the SRG!

I'm getting older by the day and a bit wobbly on memory and I can't for the life of me remember anything about this newspaper advertisement which someone gave me zonks ago as a possible illustration for the Gazette. So I apologize to my contributor whoever you are!

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.