

G&T GAZETTE

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GROUP RENTALS... for folks who hate the sight of T.V.

For folks who think they hate the sight of TV... then Group Rentals aren't going to try and change their prejudices. Just to rearrange their prejudices. Just a little. The point is: when you tackle people who are anti-TV usually they admit that 'occasionally' they do make a point of lookses. Such people are pretty 'selective' in their choice of programme. And they're as critical about the Set—as the service that goes with it.

That's why Group Rentals are just as fussy about selecting Special Agents. Group Rentals special Sets and special services warrant the knowhow of Special Agents. That's why folks who wouldn't normally be seen dead watching TV—give Group Rentals such a good reception. They know for a fact, that our Sets are made by the most respected TV firm in the country. And 'kept in order' by the biggest servicing set-up in N.Z.

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James Smith Ltd. Wellington 45 843, Porirua 8109.
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• Rentals can go as low as ten bob a week. • If set ever 'backs up' we'll replace it while we fix it. • Exclusive aerial connections. • Free insurance and parts replacement—from tube to transformer. • Choice of 4 easy rental rates. • Rental includes licence which we settle yearly. • Take your pick from a baker's dozen—every one a model of perfection. • Our business is your pleasure. More TV pleasure.

FOR TV SEE
GROUP RENTALS

ZDPA 6

I've been thinking . . .

I've been thinking about the bereavement of our friend and fellow collector Pat Byrne - and the dispersal of his record collection.

Like Pat I could leave instructions on what to do with my record collection which I began in the 1950s. So from this fact alone it might be concluded I've had my money's worth and won't begrudge how they find a new home after my demise. The only thing that worries me is how to go about dispersing them effectively. If I was to follow Pat's lead and get someone to supervise SRG members taking what they wanted, then I have no fears provided the residue could be sold through a retail outlet. With no New Zealand institution I know in the form of a library or museum having any interest in a basic collection of vocal 78 rpm recordings, I'd hope they would naturally gravitate to a new generation of collectors.

While my collection will no doubt be gratefully received by those who admire some of the finer points of singing, I doubt if anyone would voice an interest for my recordings by the German baritone Heinrich Schlusnus. Trying to find an overseas collector to acquire them wouldn't really be prudent because of shipping costs outweighing their enthusiasm and good intentions.

The other major option would be to offer them for sale on the local market. Three years ago Dennis Brew's prize collection of vocal recordings was put up for sale and after months of negotiations they eventually found a buyer in Wellington who was prepared to buy them as a financial investment. So what's the chance of this sort of sale happening again? Then again with firms like Webb's of Auckland venturing into specialist sales which take into consideration all sorts of collecting nooks and crannies, I live in hope on that front.

In this situation, I took it upon myself to do a survey of my collection and weed out recordings which I'd never played in the last couple of years and would never in one of my SRG programmes. So I began a thinning out adventure into my collection.

I started with my 10 inch recordings and after three days of deliberation I eliminated about 250 recordings with a large proportion of them coming from the Ray Harris collection which mainly consisted of jazz and dance band groups from the late 1930s to mid 1950s. Why I took this collection on in the first place can be explained in that I didn't have any clear understanding of this sort of music apart from about 20 or so discs I'd picked up during my junk shops days while hunting for classical vocal recordings. Records like Ted Lewis's band performing Alexander's Ragtime Band. So it was tremendously refreshing to own a well

compiled collection from this period of popular music. To my personal holding I added a Louis Armstrong and an Eddie Condon. I did so because I went to their concerts here in Wellington in the 1960s. So, when it's all boiled down I wasn't exactly a novice in this decision. It was a magnificent opportunity to have them in my collection and to bring me up to speed in an area about which I knew very little. However time waits for no man and I felt I had best let them go. Therefore I knew what I was in for when I took on Ray's collection and it was no great deal to do so.

As well as this sizeable deletion, I decided it was pointless me trying to collect every recording made by NZ artists like Rosina Buckman, Oscar Natzke, Ana Hato & Deane Waretini, when good quality CDs of these artists are readily available. In the end, I was left with a still very sizable 450 10 inch disc component.

My efforts to reduce my 12 inch discs down to a more manageable collection were less productive when it came to the total of deletions with about 150 getting the chop. The biggest impact on this part of my collection was to reduce my holdings of instrumental recordings. I did this rather reluctantly because I knew that there are not many collectors who pay attention to this area on vintage recorded music circles and during my foraging for vocal recordings, I've come up against some very important historical items. So I did dig my toes in on a couple of examples to retain including Landon Ronald, not purely as a pianist but as a conductor. I did this because I have two 12 inch records he made in Paris c.1912 with a French Orchestra playing the ballet music from Massenet's *Herodiade*. These discs now take their place alongside Sir Edward Elgar conducting a 1917 recording of an extract called 'Wild Bear' from his *Wand of Youth Suite* and a solitary Stravinsky accompanying the violinist Dushkin performing one of his compositions called *Air du Rossignol*. Which leads me to an explanation of what I collect and why.

Why I collect old recordings . . .

My basic musical education was divided into three phases. First my violin lessons with Zillah Castle which began in 1939, my involvement in the brass band movement 1944 to 1949, and finally my secondary school's production of Edward German's *Merrie England* in 1951. It was rounded off in a post graduate year in Auckland in 1956.

When I turned five my mother bought me a toy violin. I was infatuated with it and this led to her approaching Zillah Castle, a teacher of the violin to see if I could be taken in as a pupil. I can recall this period of my musical status succinctly because of a photograph taken with me in Zillah's garden holding my

instrument in the playing position when I was about six in the early 1940s. Under Zillah's care and encouragement I showed some talent and was entered into various competitions that were held in those years in various suburbs like Berhampore, Newtown, Lower Hutt and Wellington's Town Hall Concert chamber. Looking at a scrapbook which my mother kept about my days as a child prodigy violinist, I did pretty well in these and advanced to taking LCRM practical examinations up to a point where I could not complete my licentiate until I completed a theory examination. In the meantime my father had nominated me as a member for the newly formed Brass Band which was sponsored by the Watersiders Union. Influence by Zillah and my mother saw to it that I should not be involved in learning to play a brass instrument in deference to my violin lessons. So I was nominated as the Drum Major for what was called the Wellington Waterside Junior Band, a position which did not require me to play an instrument, but required me to lead the band on street parades which were popular towards the end of the war. My talents with the violin however were put to good use with violin solos which I performed at various Patriotic Concerts which were given to raise funds for the War effort.

In 1948, after the Polio Epidemic scare had subsided, I enrolled to do the art course at the Wellington Technical College which I enjoyed immensely. In the sixth form I volunteered to represent my house in the annual inter-house music contest by singing an old ballad called *Villikins and his Dinah*. To my great surprise, I won my section and was immediately dragooned into playing the Earl of Essex in Edward German's *Merrie England*.

Musically speaking, my three years at Canterbury University School of Fine Art were highlighted with my purchase of a radiogram which I bought on time payment. Every time I cashed my monthly Teacher's Bursary allowance I went and bought an LP. At this juncture in my musical upbringing, my horizons had been expanded to envelop the works of all the great composers. This dramatic turn of events was encouraged by contact with a number of people including some of my fellow students but especially the symphonies of Sibelius which was due to my painting lecturer Bill Sutton. Supplementing my knowledge on what to buy in the way of LPs was made much easier when I began to take the monthly magazine called *The Gramophone*.

The final phase in my musical education occurred in my postgraduate year at Auckland where I was required to do a post primary course at the Training College. By chance I landed digs in the form of a sun porch in a house in Richborne Street Kingsland with five other students one of whom was Roger Hart. Roger had preceded me through Art School and Training College and was teaching art at a local intermediate school. His room in Richborne Street was big enough to take his record collection plus a turntable, amplifier and a 12 inch

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CATALOGUE No 10 - APRIL 1900.

BETTINI PHONOGRAPH
LABORATORY

110 Fifth Avenue, New York.

Cable address. Micrograph, New York.

The advertisement is a vertical poster for Bettini Phonograph Laboratory. At the top, it reads 'A True Mirror of Sound'. Below this is the brand name 'BETTINI' in large, bold, serif letters. To the right of the name is a stack of gramophone records, each with a circular portrait of a famous artist. The portraits are labeled with names: 'THE BELZARE', 'PIERRE KONIGER', 'THE GREAT BERNARDINI', 'PIERRE VERNI D'YCO', 'THE SPANISH', 'THE POLISH', 'THE CALVE', and 'THE ANTONIO'. Below the brand name, the text 'MICRO-PHONOGRAPH' is written in a decorative, cursive font. Further down, it says 'MICRO-DIAPHRAGMS FOR PHONOGRAPH AND GRAPHOPHONE'. The central part of the advertisement features a large illustration of a gramophone with a prominent horn. To the left of the gramophone is a classical statue of a woman, possibly representing Music or a similar allegorical figure. At the bottom of the advertisement, it reads 'BETTINI CELEBRATED "/>

PHONOGRAPH & RECORD COLLECTORS CONVENTION 1965



Mr. Savage, Mr. Mac Millan, Mr. Norris, Mrs. East, Mr. Sterrart, Mr. Stewart,
Mr. Hardy, Mr. Gollidge, Mr. Sadd, Mr. Hedges, Mr. Fisher, Mrs Phillips, Mr. Mackay,
Mr. Cornelis, Mr. Woolf, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Ladbrook, Mr. Andrews, Mr. Crawford,
Mr. Spencer, Mr. Cameron, Mr. Magan, Mr. Donelly, Mr. Howard, Mr. Main,
Mr. Lindsay, Master Gollidge, Mr. Cameron, Master East, Mr Kim, Mr Lee, Mr Osgood.





speaker in a 'woofer box'. Roger's contribution to my musical education was more than just listening to records. At the time he was receiving singing lessons and at the drop of a hat would burst forth with a Vaughan Williams song or a Burl Ives ballad. Our house entertained a lot where Roger's record player featured. My contribution to all this was to lend him my one and only dixieland recording of Ted Lewis's band playing Alexander's Ragtime Band. On more sober and sedate occasions I joined another resident of Richborne Street, Phillip Slight, in playing Haydn violin duets on Sunday afternoons.*

A New Leaf . . .

At the end of 1956 I returned to Wellington to take up an appointment as an art teacher at my old college. One of the things high on my list to make this a smooth transition was a record playing set-up similar to Roger's in Auckland. For this I approached the owner of an electrical goods shop in Newtown to supply me with a 5 amp custom made amplifier and a 12 inch speaker which I mounted in a wooden box.

My first year back in Wellington saw me keen to expand my 78 rpm record collection. To accomplish this I advertised in the classified columns of the *Evening Post* with moderate success. Further to this I purchased a book called *Record Collecting* by Boris Semeonoff, a publication which has stood the test of time over the years. As well I took out a subscription for *The Record Collector*, a quarterly which I continue to take to this day.

My advertising in the classified columns put me in touch with a number of collectors who shared their experiences with me, some of which went back to the days when Edison phonographs competed for popularity with gramophones. Foremost in this group of record collectors were Fred Spencer (Plumber), Charlie Lindsay (Taxidermist - Dominion Museum), Stan Northcote-Bade (Honorary Curator Colonial History - Dominion Museum) and Mit Howard (a retired gentleman). These collectors had a great influence on me after I got used to their blind loyalty to Thomas Alva Edison. In many respects this admiration was not born out of his product but a man who made something from nothing through his various inventions. Others I met were Ray Bresanello (a teacher in Wainuiomata), John Simpson (Office supervisor - Evening Post), Ray Hedges (Inland Revenue Department), Alan Sadd (Civil Servant), Michael Woolf (Actor), Jack Root (a Dutch entrepreneur) & Don Cameron (Technical Books Manager. Whitcombe and Tombs).

Within 18 months of my return to Wellington I placed an advertisement in the Personal columns of the *Evening Post* which invited those interested in old records to get in touch with me to form a group that could meet and play record-

ings from the past. This eventually led to the formation of what we know today as The Scratchy Record Group which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008.

Other names that can be linked to this particular period worth mentioning who stayed in touch with our organisation from their homes in other New Zealand locations were Walter Norris (a farmer in Rangiora), Pam Rodgers (Secretary to a publishing firm), Gavin East (Librarian) - both from Christchurch, Wally Gollidge (Weights and Measure inspector) - Nelson, Dennis Brew (Manager) and Rod Cornelius - (TV producer) Auckland.

The name of Pam Rogers on the list above brings to mind the fact that very few women's names appear in the annals of record collecting. In fact of the 7-8 people who responded to my advertisement regarding the formation of a group who could meet and listen to recordings from the past there was only Ingha Kahn, a young Jewish woman who attended some of our meetings before she became enticed into a relationship with an unsavoury character. Later in the late 1970s & early 1980s we did have the pleasure and company of a secondary school teacher Margaret Gallagher.

Not satisfied with these advances in establishing an indigenous group I had the audacity to write to some collecting authorities overseas whose articles in various magazines I took caught my attention. To my utter amazement, they took pity on my isolation and answered all my inane inquiries. After several letters were exchanged between Bill Moran and Boris Semeonoff, I ventured the thought of exchanging records with them by supplying duplicate lists of recordings which I was willing to exchange for artists that I never saw in my junk shop excursions. While Boris Semeonoff in Edinburgh was familiar to the business of doing up parcels of records and shipping them through the mail to all parts of the world, Bill Moran in California found it difficult to find time from his business as company executive for this laborious task. To make the job easier, I asked him to look through his records for any spare Frances Alda discs. In due course I received a box containing about twenty 10 inch Victor recordings! These were mainly ballads Alda made which did not get distributed to this part of the world. Boris on the other hand was very keen to acquire any record I could find of the pianist Mischa Levitzki. As luck would have it his records were pressed in Australia and were relatively easy to come across which led to at least two parcels of recordings being exchanged between us.

Meanwhile, Michael Woolf and I joined Charlie Lindsay in the early 1960s at the Dominion Museum and helped him mount displays of gramophones and phonographs from the Museums collection during the school holidays. Our role was primarily to be on hand and play a few cylinders and discs and explain the circumstances which led to their production and development. These activities led to an idea which was mooted by collectors in Auckland and Christchurch to

stage a national convention to be held over Labour Weekend in 1963. This was a great success and was followed up by bi-annual conferences which alternated between Wellington and Christchurch. See insert photo from the 1965 convention taken on the steps of the Dominion Museum by Frank O'Leary.

Going International . . .

One of the most important things to emerge from this inaugural gathering was the production of a 45 rpm recording from a rare Bettini cylinder of the famous Polish soprano Marcella Sembrich singing J. Strauss's *Voce di Primavera*. The cylinder was owned by Walter Norris who lived in Swannanoa near Rangiora, in Canterbury. To obtain a tape recording of this treasure required Michael and I along with David Graves who designed the Primo record label. Eventually the three of us set off in my station wagon with a reel to reel Ferrograph tape recorder, plus an Edison phonograph which had to be specially adapted to take a 5 inch cylinder, to make a master tape from which we produced a single sided pressing. The end result of all this was an edition of 500 recordings which we distributed to agents in England, America and Australia. To our great surprise *The Gramophone* awarded it one of the best reissue recordings for 1965.

One unexpected spin-off from me contacting various authorities on old recordings was to have them pay me a visit. Bill Moran's business as a company executive took him on visits to various countries to obtain oil exploration agreements from various Governments. Accordingly he notified me that he was coming to New Zealand in 1974 and I was able to meet up with him and give him a sampling of our country by driving him on a day trip into the Wairarapa. Likewise Laurie Hervingham-Root, an Australian collector who was an authority on early celebrity recordings by the Gramophone and Typewriter Company, wrote explaining he was coming to New Zealand and would like to meet up with me during a tour of Australian Railway enthusiasts. This led to an exchange of recordings between us which left me very happy with two Plancon records coming my way. In the years to follow I paid Bill Moran two visits by having a stopover in Los Angeles for a couple of days, the last of these in 2001. Similarly in September 1994 I made a two day visit to Edinburgh where amongst other things I had an enjoyable afternoon tea with Boris Semeonoff and his wife.

So much for the origins of the Scratchy Record Group, a name which was given to us by Roger Hart's daughter Emma, who coined the phrase when describing to a friend what her daddy did when he entertained us at his place. As such it has survived over the years. As a final footnote I would add that I have not been responsible for everything pertaining to the group 'from woe to go' which has evolved. In the early 1970s I stood aside as an organiser for a period and

encouraged Don Cameron and Jack Root in their roles to put their imprint on our activities.

This period was notable for the consolidation of certain characteristics which go to make up both groups in Christchurch and Wellington. Looking through the roster of presenters it's noticeable how those in the South Island favoured talks on the performance of phonographs and gramophones. On the other hand SRG members have always been urged to present a programme of recordings from their collections. This parting of the ways is also reflected in the naming of each group such as the *Vintage Phonograph Society of New Zealand* in Christchurch which gives a very clear idea of their intention and purpose. As does the title *Scratchy Record Group* with its clear and precise meaning inherent in our name and what you might expect during a Sunday afternoons entertainment in Wellington.

To a casual onlooker, the character of both groups is also reflected in the people who have become associated with each organisation. While I do not have access to a membership list in Christchurch who pay an annual subscription, I do have a very clear picture of the SRG membership who entertain members in their homes on a monthly basis. Currently our organisation consists of fourteen members with nearly a third being either acting or retired broadcasting presenters - or announcers as they were once known, with retired Wellingtonians making up the remainder. We don't have office bearers or an annual sub, but Des and I arrange any business which has to be conducted like handing out a printed roster etc. The SRG has no official publication to keep members informed like VPSNZ's impressive *The Phonographic Record*. I produce the *G&T Gazette* as a personal indulgence which contains a lot of mischievous muses / museings (?) which generally reflect the SRG's love of music from old recordings.

Bill Main

* In the winter of 1967, I came off my Vespa motor scooter and broke a metacarpus in my left hand. This and my over active life lifestyle at the time (renovating our house) has meant I've never had an urge to take up the violin again.

Cover caption:

When I was asked to 'sit in' this advertisement for Group Rentals, I did so willingly for David Graves, an American Graphic Designer who taught at the Wellington Polytechnic, repaying him for his work in designing the label for Primo Records. Despite its eye catching qualities, it only received one insertion!

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.