

EDITORIAL

To most detached observers the collecting of phonograph records is a harmless, if expensive, hobby. To those in the game it is the most contagious, incurable, serious, and educational of interests, with the possible exception of book collecting. There are several categories of discomania. Some begin with a love of music, some with an interest in interpretative artists. To others rarity and antiquity are enough; some are content to amass unplayed disks for the pleasure of contemplating their variegated labels. On any of these collectors it may dawn at some time that they are dealing with documents in sound, that the value of a recording does not begin and end with casual listening or contemplation. For more than a half century now, not only the greats of the musical world, but outstanding personalities from every walk of life, have been sending out messages to all who will hear about their talents, their convictions, and about their careers. History, thereby, has taken on a new dimension.

The first public libraries to add records to their collections of books and music were not thinking in terms of posterity. As long ago as 1914 there was a recordings section in Saint Paul. About a decade later there were listening collections in New York and Philadelphia, among other cities. But the disks were available to anyone who would make an appointment, and they were more or less expendable. The archival collection, dedicated to the preservation of sound documents, was still a thing of the future on this side of the Atlantic. To be sure, the Library of Congress, and earlier the Smithsonian Institution, had been doing systematic field work recording folk music throughout the country -- the present vast archives in Washington were well past the beginning stages. In the thirties agreements were made with many record companies to send copies of all new releases to the Library of Congress. At the same time the New York Public Library was laying the foundations for its large archival collection. Gifts from companies and from many private individuals were stored, so that when financing and space could be found for listening facilities, an impressive collection would already be in existence. The dream has achieved realization in the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound at the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. Other historical collections were established in various parts of the country, notably at Yale, Stanford, Syracuse, and Michigan State universities. Outstanding archives of ethnic and folk music have been built up at the University of Indiana, at Columbia, and at UCLA in Los Angeles. Recorded Speech archives are planned at Brooklyn College, while the Oral History Project at Columbia and the unparalleled collection of recorded broadcasts at the University of Washington in Seattle typify other areas of special endeavor.

It was because such archives were springing up in so many places, sometimes without notice beyond that of a local character -- and also because of the known existence of unique and irreplaceable material in many private collections -- that a need became felt for The Association for Recorded Sound Collections. From the first exploratory meeting in July 1965 at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, it has been perfectly clear that not only public and university libraries, but private individuals as well, are willing and anxious to cooperate in the pooling and exchange of resources in order to make documentation available to those who need it -- be they scholars, historians, writers, or musical artists.

Among the Association's initial accomplishments is publication through the New York Public Library of a directory of American sound archives and collections, which will be available by the time these words reach print. It is a fundamental aim of ARSC thus to develop means of locating the whereabouts of existing recorded sound materials, and to assure that such materials are properly cared for and not lost. Valuable specialized collections, indeed, should never be dispersed, but should find their way in due course into institutions with the means both to serve and to preserve such materials for study and research purposes.

In short, record collecting is much more than a harmless hobby.

-- Philip L. Miller

THE EDISON AUTOGRAPH ALBUM AT THE RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN ARCHIVES

Among the choice mementos from the infancy of the phonograph contained in the holdings of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound at the New York Public Library in Lincoln Center is an Edison autograph album furnished to Company representatives throughout the world for the purpose of gathering testimonial advertising.

One of these representatives, and a personal friend of Edison, was one J.H. Block, who travelled to Russia in 1889-90, and again in 1894. As a tribute to the memory of Thomas Edison in the ninetyeth year following his invention of the phonograph on August 12, 1877, the ARSC Journal offers these telling excerpts from Mr. Block's autograph album. (all are translated from the Russian, French, or German, save for that of Tolstoy, which was written in English):

- D.H.

The phonograph is certainly the most surprising, the most beautiful, and the most interesting among all inventions that have turned up in the 19th century. Glory to the great inventor, Edison!

P.I. Tchaikovsky
14/26 October, 1889