

FOR THE RECORD  
by Michael Biel

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PART 1 EXPLANATION OF WHY THIS ONE IS SO SHORT

I have been rather verbose these past two issues, and while I am certainly not going to promise to be any shorter-winded in the future, you will not have to suffer through more than a couple of pages this time. This special issue of the Journal took a shorter time to prepare than usual--being as it is the index volume--and I do not have the special sections that I have been promising ready just yet. But I do have a couple of items I want to mention that should be of interest to all and don't really want to wait.

PART 2 THOSE AFOREMENTIONED ITEMS OF INTEREST

"Recordings by Billy Murray" Compiled by Barbara Prosser, Preliminary 10/1/78 edition. Available to serious researchers from the author at 2143 Bull Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29201.

In Brian Rust's "Introduction" to his 1973 The Complete Entertainment Discography he explained why artists such as Billy Murray, Irving Kaufman, Edward M. Favor, Henry Burr, and Ada Jones were not included. He said: "Artists whose fame spread through their records, and who in this medium were truly prolific . . . seem to us to deserve a volume each." In the half-decade since that statement was made there have been a number of efforts to bring it to fruition. Milford Fargo's work on Ada Jones was mentioned in this column in the previous issue, and Edward Moogk devoted twenty pages to Henry Burr's discography (as Harry McClasky, his real name) in Roll Back the Years, mentioned in this column two issues ago. Another giant leap for mankind (and womankind) is Ms. Prosser's listing of Billy Murray's recordings. It has its faults and is only a first draft, but she is well on her way to completing a job that few of us ever thought possible.

I had expected a thin envelope to be delivered and was rather pleasantly surprised when a hefty parcel over an inch thick landed on my desk with a resounding thud. This preliminary work is one hundred and seventy-seven pages long. 1845 sides are listed by Murray and about half that number of reverse sides by other artists are additionally included. This inclusion adds to the confusion because it necessitates the underlining of the titles that are by Murray. Composer, Broadway show source, matrix number, and recording date are shown where known. Most matrix numbers and dates are lacking because Ms. Prosser has not yet been able to make the trip to New

York and West Orange to inspect the files of Victor, Columbia, and Edison. She will find these files reveal that some songs that appeared on different labels are occasionally the same recording and thus should not have been listed with different discography serial numbers. Conversely, these files will also allow her to know what titles were remade by Murray many years later and issued with the original catalogue number. She has not yet had the opportunity to deal with un-issued recordings except those included in various books by Brian Rust, and the recording ledgers of the companies will thereby extend the length of the list quite a bit.

The organization of the list is clumsy to work with as a discography, but the assigning of a discographical serial number to each seemingly different recording will facilitate the communication of additions and corrections by other researchers. The information about the reverse sides by other artists is superfluous unless the reader has shelved the record under the other artist's name. Hopefully it will be eliminated at the final publication, at which time I also hope she will drop the numbering of each recording. The order of the recordings is alphabetical according to title. With the use of the recording ledgers I hope she can decide to arrange the recordings chronologically by matrix number. That is the modern discographical (or bi-discographical) method that has become so successful.

I am still in awe of the fact that someone working alone down in South Carolina with no access to record company ledgers could have compiled so extensive a list. She is welcoming any additions and corrections--which is the reason for making the preliminary version available. I have been informed by George Blacker that a Canadian researcher named Robert Morrith had also been working independently on a Billy Murray discography for some years. I hope that collaboration will be possible, for this is a project that is starting to convince many of us skeptics that the impossible can be done.

"Discography of Blackface Comedy Dialogues" by Robert Cogswell of the Indiana University Folklore Institute. Available from the author at 602 N. Summit Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.

Speaking of the impossible, try to imagine a doctoral dissertation entitled "Jokes in Blackface: A Discographic Folklore Study." That's right, a full analysis with no punches pulled detailing the recordings of blackface comedy teams such as Moran and Mack, Cook and Fleming, Miller and Lyles, Moss and Frye, Correll and Gosden, and Golden and Hughes/Heins/Marlowe. Many of us have become very careful about who we play these records for. We have no wish to offend. Yet ethnic humor was a part of American culture and folklore and deserves to be examined and studied. If you are of Jewish, Irish, Scotch, German, Chinese, Italian, or American Indian descent then your group was the butt of many jokes. Some were mean, some showed incisive psychological insight, some showed the true prejudices of the performers (stories

about Walter C. Kelly, "The Virginian Judge" seem to bear this out), while others meant no harm with their placement of the routines in dialects that were themselves funny sounding. Hiding the records won't change the past. A serious study and analysis of them might improve ethnic understanding (a la "All In The Family.")

To facilitate his analysis of recordings of blackface comedy duo-teams (excluding solo recordings, "coon songs," and minstrel shows for reasons of restricting the study to a reasonable length), Cogswell has prepared a discography of considerable depth and detail. Matrix and take numbers are included in almost every instance. Twenty three teams are listed--some of them extremely obscure--and all known recordings by Billy Golden as a solo artist and with his three partners are additionally listed. Thirty four labels issued these records with Cogswell painstakingly documenting the instances of variant recordings or leased masters on differing labels. Additional note is made of a dozen comedy team records issued in the Columbia and Paramount Race Series which were mostly done by black comedians!

Robert Cogswell has done his homework and has produced a worthy document. I was amazed to find that I could only add one record to his list in addition to giving him news (and tapes) of additional alternate takes of "Two Black Crows, Parts 3 & 4." He is still seeking tapes of some of the sides and will annotate the discography to note the tapes and discs he already has. This certainly is a worthy project to be aided by any collector of comedy records, and a copy of this discography will be a valuable reference source pending the completion of the entire Ph.D. dissertation.

The Edison Cylinder Phonographs 1877-1929. George L. Frow and Albert F. Sefl. Sevenoaks, Kent: George L. Frow, 1978. 207+ xii pp. illus. ISBN 0 9505462 2 4 cloth. \$14.95.

Subtitled "A Detailed Account of the Entertainment Models Until 1929", this fine book is the long awaited revision of Frow's pioneering A Guide To The Edison Cylinder Phonograph. That 1970 booklet had a very limited printing and has been long unavailable from the author due to all of the additional information he felt should have been included. I had been proud to own a copy until George told me that my copy was one of an unauthorized overpriced reprint for which he never received any compensation. Copies of that earlier version have been worn out by many a machine collector due to constant reference, and this new edition has justified the long wait many of them have had to put up with.

The printing has been beautifully done on excellent coated stock which brings out the details of the several hundred photographs. The research has been authoritatively done based on personal observation and inspection of many hundreds of machines, and access to the Edison company files in both England and the United States. If

you own an Edison entertainment-type cylinder phonograph it is detailed in this book no matter how weird a variation you might think it is. Every slight manufacturing change of consequence is noted. Taken in proper perspective it is a fascinating chronicle of the change of style, purpose, and fortune of the Edison company. As a guidebook to collecting Edison phonographs it is unequalled and necessary.

While most of the readers of this Journal are primarily interested in the sound recordings themselves rather than the machines they were played on, nevertheless, the major companies like Edison, Victor, Columbia, Pathé, and Brunswick had a dual interest in both areas. The overall corporate interest was the primary concern of the management of these companies. It is possible to gain insight into the recording and releasing policies of these companies by examining the progression of their other main activity--the manufacture of phonographs. Frow and Sefl have made a major contribution with this book. I hope we can interest them (or someone else) to follow up with Edison disc machines and detailed studies of the other companies.

A Collector's Guide to the Columbia Spring-Wound Cylinder Graphophone, 1894-1910. Howard Hazlcorn. Brooklyn: Antique Phonograph Monthly, 1976. 36 pp. illus. \$6.50. A.P.M. Monograph Series; No. 2.

While not as finely detailed as the Frow and Sefl Edison book mentioned above, Hazlcorn has provided the machine collectors with a needed guide to the often overlooked but equally interesting machines manufactured by Columbia. Arranged in chronological order of introduction, a paragraph is devoted to describing each model in order to enable the collector to identify it and note its significance in the history of the company. The lowest and highest serial numbers of each model known to exist in major collections is given and an attempt is made to estimate the quantity of each model manufactured and their rarity. Fourteen reproducers and nineteen machines are pictured, but most of the pictures are not opposite the page where their descriptions are printed. This is inconvenient and occasionally misleading. There is one point brought out in this book which is usually overlooked by most collectors--Columbia manufactured and sold a spring driven cylinder machine for home entertainment use in 1894, the year before Edison. This book is available from Alan Koenigsberg at the Antique Phonograph Monthly.

The EMI Collection. E. Bayly. Bournemouth, England: Talking Machine Review, 1977. 2nd edition. 188 pp. illus. SBN 902338 28 5.

It is rare that a company takes such an interest in their own business that they keep a museum collection of their products. Such is the case with EMI in England which gathered examples of the phonographs built by their predecessors, The Gramophone Co., and Columbia. In 1974 EMI also purchased a collection of over 200 phonographs of

all makes from a Dutch collector. Nearly three hundred machines are pictured dating from the 1870's through the 1920's. Some are common, some are British variations of American models, and some are scarce and strange. All are interesting. The descriptions given are very authoritative and include important measurements which enable the reader to more accurately gauge the size of the device.

It is strongly advised that copies of this book not be purchased from the author and the original publisher. Ernie Bayly originally printed it on a rather poor paper stock and much of the photographic detail was obscured. He did arrange a limited run on a finer quality coated paper which is available exclusively from Alan Koenigsberg. This special APM edition is well worth \$9.95 to any machine collector or archive of acoustical recordings.

Edison Disc Recordings. Volume 1. Numerical list. Raymond R. Wile. Philadelphia: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1978. 427 pp. Spiral bound.

As most of the readers of this Journal know, Ray has been researching the very early history of the phonograph companies, especially Edison. This thick volume contains the complete listing of assigned Edison records in numerical order, along with a short list of two dozen special recordings, and a complete list of dealer sampler records. Matrix numbers are given but take letters are not mentioned because almost all Edison discs were issued in alternate takes and the company files rarely listed takes. While recording dates are not given (and remake sessions not even indicated), the dates the selections were assigned to a coupling by the Music Room Committee are given, as are the dates the record was listed in a catalogue supplement, and deleted. There are no title or artist indexes. These will be incorporated in future volumes--a fact unfortunately not indicated in the present volume. I hope these future volumes will not be too long delayed.

A numerical list presents the fascinating scope of what records were issued by the company at the same time and also shows some rather unlikely juxtapositions of adjacently numbered records. But if you're looking for a record by your favorite artist or of a specific song, you've got a long search ahead of you unless you know the release number. Also, the fascinating world of unreleased recordings is locked behind a secure door. I can understand why Ray chose to publish the numerical list first--it probably was the first one to be completed! But Ray, we're all counting on you to reveal finally all the secrets hidden away in the upper floors of the Edison Site. The lists of titles and artists should include all those unreleased masters, and we really do want a complete matrix listing (if it's not asking too much!) (Then we can start bothering Leah Burt at the Site to see if there's a test pressing up in the attic!:) Hopefully these other lists will give the recording dates when known and information about later remake sessions. (I'd love

to see the payroll, royalty, and sales data included on one of these lists too, but we can't be too greedy with Ray's time. He has many other research projects underway--as well as a family!) The current volume is available from the Edison National Historic Site.

Collections sold: The National Broadcasting Company collection mentioned in the previous edition of this column has been transferred by the Museum of Broadcasting to the Library of Congress. Unlike the previous transfer to the Museum where the discs remained in the NBC warehouse on West 52nd Street in New York, the entire collection has been moved to (I believe) the Library of Congress' Maryland annex facility. (Wear gloves when you open the boxes of glass base discs, fellows. I've heard tales about the NBC glass discs while they were still in New York! Don't cut yourselves.) Seriously folks, we should all be glad that this most valuable resource has been preserved for the American people and posterity. With the prospect of the new Library of Congress building in the near future, we hope that the Library will not be overtaxed in providing researchers and historians access to the abundant wealth of materials contained in this vast collection.

The Estate of Harold D. Smith, also mentioned in the last issue of this column, is in the process of being transferred to The National Library of Canada as of this writing, according to Steven Smolian. Unless the purchase is not approved, it probably will be finalized by the time you read this. Perhaps some wrists should be slapped here in this country for allowing this outstanding collection of material about the major American recording company to leave the country, but this particular transfer has many advantages over some of the potential American purchasers. The NLC has proven to be a very accessible research library, rather than some private educational institutions which might have retained all research rights for its own faculty and students. Retaining this collection intact has also enabled scholars to have the prospect of studying the workings of Victor Talking Machine Co. in an unprecedented fashion outside of RCA's own corporate records.

## PART 2 SON OF CENTENNIAL

While I have not finished compiling the second installment of publications concerning the 1977 Centennial of Sound Recording, 1979 is another Edison 100 year celebration of note. In fact, it should turn out to gain more public attention than did ours in 1977. This year's celebration is marking the anniversary of Edison's incandescent light. Already some in the media are making a big fuss, so the name of Edison will be once again be in the public eye. There has al-

ready been a television biography of his telegraphic career ("Mark Twain's America", NBC, January 11, 1979, 8-9 p.m.) and a commemorative postage stamp will be issued later this year in New Jersey (where the 1977 Sound Recording stamp should have been issued.) Collectors of Edison might be interested in digging up the first of these tributes to pass my way.

Rural Kentuckian, February 1979. (P. O. Box 32170, Louisville, Ky, 40232. ISSN 0036-0066.) The electricity running my typewriter comes from a Rural Electric Co-op which makes me eligible for this inspiring publication. This particular issue has a cover picture and autograph of Edison with a three page article by Fran Maierhauser about Edison, electricity, the light bulb, and places of Edisonia to visit.

Ham Radio Horizons, March 1979. (Communications Technology, Inc., Greenville, New Hampshire 03048. ISSN 0147-8818.) This relatively new amateur radio monthly has occasionally run interesting historical articles in its two year history. This issue contains a twelve-page article by James Kates and Norman Smith discussing how the incandescent bulb and the Edison Effect led to all of modern electronics. It is well illustrated and documented. The cover and lead page of the article feature two full color, full page paintings of Edison which might make nice prints if the magazine publisher were so inclined.

By the way, I promise to have another installment of the Sound Recording Centennial publications in the next issue.