

The Record Collector's International Directory by Gary S. Felton (Crown Publishers, Inc., 1980. \$8.95)

I may be the wrong person to review this new directory. I am in it, and my own listing is incorrect!

That, unfortunately, is only a minor problem among the many that the book has. What we have here is another mangled mass of information, uncritically dumped into print by someone who did not know, or chose not to learn, his subject.

The methodology, as explained in the introduction, sounds impressive and that by itself will no doubt be enough to persuade many an unwary book buyer (as well as some reviewers--see Nat Hentoff's effusive comments on the cover). The author says that he has set out to compile a comprehensive guide to dealers and stores carrying "rare, discontinued or hard-to-find records." He claims to have used three main sources of information: (1) a search of the telephone company yellow pages for the nation's 160 largest cities, extracting the name of any advertiser offering "rare," "deleted" or "out-of-print" records (phone books from major cities in English-speaking foreign countries were also searched); (2) leads supplied directly by dealers, collectors, clubs, collectors' publications and others in the field; and (3) the classified advertising sections of various magazines.

A total of 1,206 names were thus obtained, and each was sent a three-page questionnaire. The author does not state how many replies he got, but only 521 detailed entries are given in the book, so it must have been less than half. Dealers have been separated into "Class I" and "Class II," according to whether they carry a major stock of "truly rare records"--whatever that means--or only carry such records as an incidental sideline. A few peculiarities are noted in the rules; for example, the author says he has "painstakingly tried to eliminate the names of dealers ... who are shoddy." A charming way to put it, but he might have been a little more specific about what earns a dealer that opprobrium.

A typical listing goes as follows:

BONGO BREATH RECORDS!
(address, hours)

SERVICES: Mail Order Only

SPECIALTIES: Punk Rock/New Wave, British Invasion, Surfing, Promotional, Christmas, Comedy, Novelty, Nostalgia, Sound Tracks, Rockabilly, Country & Western

VOLUME: 33 1/3 - 20,000
78 - 9,000
78

VOLUME: (cont'd)
78 - 350
Other - (listed)

STOCK: Domestic & Import/New & Used

SEARCH: Want lists maintained and requestor notified when record comes in.

COLLECTIONS: Will buy collections of rare records.

PAYMENTS: Money Order, Personal Check *U.S.A.)

MAIL ORDER: 4th Class, Whatever shipment method requested; Prepayment or C.O.D.

DISCOUNTS: (no information)

PUBLICATIONS: Quarterly catalog available for \$1 per year.

Following these detailed entries is a section listing more than 400 people who are "believed" to be dealers, by name and address only (no information on what they sell).

This much is purely descriptive. How accurate is the book? Who is listed? Are the principal dealers, at least, all here?

For starters, I conducted a little test. Taking the latest 20 auction lists which I have received myself (all within the last year), I checked to see how many of the dealers were included here. Like most collectors I seem to get lists all the time, from the strangest places. I haven't asked anyone for a list in years, and have never paid for one; most of those I get I do not respond to. But still they come, multiplying like cheerful rabbits: "Hello there, would you like some Connie Francis records on Japanese Victor? Maybe Elvis on Norwegian Sun-kist? How about a pink Lambert cylinder of "When the Bell in the Lighthouse Goes 'Ding, Dong'?"

For some reason I do not throw these lists out, but dump them in a box in the cellar. So there is your sample. Admittedly it is weighted toward popular, jazz and blues, somewhat toward 78's, and of course toward mail order auctions. But those dealers should be here. In the interests of fairness I did not count lists that were apparently one-shot affairs; all of the 20 are to the best of my knowledge from relatively well-established dealers.

The result was that 11 of the 20 were not in the Directory at all, and two others were but lacked any useful information (e.g., what they sell). In other words, 13--or two-thirds--did not have usable listings. What was more alarming, several of those not listed were extremely important dealers, principal sources that any collectors entering the

field should know about. For example, a collector interested in prime quality classical 78's and cylinders should certainly be told about Larry Holdridge, one of the principal U.S. dealers in that type of material. Anyone seeking early popular 78's definitely ought to know about Peter Leavitt (with his frequent 40-page lists), Olin Carver and Fred Williams, among others. For a collector who wants prime quality jazz or blues, Mike Stewart's name is essential. None of them are here. Listed with no identification are Paul Burgess, who is in fact one of the main sources of top-grade early jazz, and Doug Seroff, an important source of early blues & gospel.

In summary, a lot of major dealers (never mind minor ones) are not included, or are listed by name and address only in a long, alphabetical section, with no indication of what they sell. This is not simply a case of bound-to-miss-a-few. It is more like compiling a "comprehensive" guide to automobile manufacturers of the world and leaving out Ford and General Motors!

There is no explanation why so many key dealers are left out entirely. For those with abbreviated entries, the reason given is that these people did not return questionnaires. However if Mr. Felton did in fact consult knowledgeable sources in the field he certainly would have learned all he needed to know about them. He could have readily determined that Musique offers primarily vintage material; that Music Masters is a New York store that issues its own LP's of vintage show music; that Floyd Silver puts out a list of cylinders; and so on. I don't know who the author's "authorities" were, but these dealers (and many, many others) are well known in their respective fields. To give no information at all about them reduces the usefulness of the Directory immeasurably.

Those who did return questionnaires, and who do get detailed entries, have their own set of problems. There were evidently several dozen categories of music a dealer could check off, and the tendency seems to have been to check off a lot of them--whatever the dealer's main specialty might be. To compound the problem, some dealers did not rank order their specialties, so for them musical categories are listed in alphabetical order. All of this can result in a very distorted picture of what a particular dealer can supply. Val Shively, one of the biggest American mail order dealers, may have checked off eleven categories including disco (!), but anyone knowledgeable about the rock field would immediately identify him as principally a source of vintage rock and R&B 45's. Likewise, The Old Tyme Music Scene is well known as a source of pre-War 78's and cylinders, but here it sounds like a local branch of the Disco-Hut chain.

A much preferable approach would have been for the author himself to characterize the principal orientation of each dealer. He should also track down information on all of the major dealers, including those who don't return questionnaires. If they are really major dealers, such information shouldn't be hard to get. It would also be helpful to list the name of the proprietor of each mail order service, so the collector

would know who he was dealing with.

The reader, after all, simply wants to know where to find a given type of record. He doesn't much care about imprecise questionnaires or the author's response-rate problems. Such difficulties can and should be overcome. As it is, these imprecise entries are going to send readers on a lot of wild goose chases.

Another section of the book cross-references dealers by category of music carried. This is a nice idea, except that the categories are so muddled that it really is not of much help. Many categories simply are not clear. What, exactly, does "historical" mean? "Vocal"? "Nostalgia"? "All major categories" (sic)? Different dealers evidently mean different things by these terms. How would you find, for example, acoustic classical 78's? The "classical" heading has 95 entries, many of whom obviously meant more modern stuff.

The underlying problem seems to be that the author is merely compiling the results of a questionnaire, rather than applying his own first hand (or even second-hand) knowledge of the field to properly categorize and describe the various dealers. This same problem is evident in a section on collectors' magazines. Many are listed, but without sufficient description to allow the reader to intelligently choose among them. One can hardly distinguish Popular Music and Society from Kastlemusick Monthly Bulletin from Recorded Sound in this listing, even though they are worlds apart in orientation. (The ARSC Journal fares better than most, described as "classical (principally), jazz, documentary and rock," with "articles on scholarly subjects.")

For some reason magazine prices are always given on a per issue basis, even though most are not sold that way. The rate for the ARSC Journal is given as "\$4.00." As in the dealer's section, some important publications have no description at all; for example, Storyville, Matrix and Discographer (not the one that folded ten years ago--?)

The section on collector's books is a joke. None of Brian Rust's essential discographies are here, nor is Dixon-Godrich; but Osborne & Hamilton's flashy price guides all are. Allen Koenigsberg's book on Edison Cylinder Records is listed, but not the Wile or Karlin companion pieces on Diamond Discs. The Joel Whitburn books are listed, but the description completely misses the point that they are indexes to the Billboard charts. Most of the descriptions seem to be promotional blurbs; it appears that the author has never seen most of these books.

In short, The Record Collector's International Directory is a major disappointment in a field that badly needs intelligent coverage. One hopes that in future editions the author will do first hand research and make informed, critical judgements rather than simply tabulate questionnaires. There are a lot of names and addresses here, but from there on the reader is on his own.

NOTE: For the record, there is not and never has been anything called "Tim Brooks Records" (page 283). This writer puts out an auction list of historic printed material from time to time, such as early record catalogs, machine catalogs, supplements, flyers and the like. I don't recall whether the author sent me a questionnaire, but if he did I certainly would have answered it. Alternatively, one of the hundreds of people who have dealt with me could presumably have filled him in. Nevertheless, according to the Directory, Tim Brooks is "known ... or strongly believed" (his emphasis) to be a rare record dealer. You can't win!

Tim Brooks