

A PROVISIONAL MAPLESON CYLINDER CHRONOLOGY

- 1865 - October 23. Lionel S. Mapleson born, London, England, of a line of music librarians going back to the mid-18th century. His uncle was the famed impresario "Colonel" James Henry Mapleson.
- 1889 - Emigration to New York, having been trained by his music librarian-violinist father and having played under Hans Richter as violinist and violist. He joined the orchestra of the then six-year-old Metropolitan Opera and soon assumed the position of Librarian, serving in that capacity for 48 years.
- 1893 - Marriage to Helen White, a soprano in the Company.
- 1900 - Following acquisition of an Edison cylinder phonograph (Home - Model A - "suitcase" type), Mapleson undertakes initial recording experiments with Metropolitan Opera artists. Marcella Sembrich during March of this year records the cadenza from Johan Strauss's Frühlingstimmen (in its popular Italian language vocal version, Voci di primavera). Mapleson adds his own announcement at the close.
- 1901 - January 16. From the Metropolitan Opera prompter's box, Mapleson records Mme. Melba in the Infanta's Alleluia from Massenet's Le Cid, this being the earliest of the extant 2-minute wax cylinders taken by him from actual stage performances. Other notable Melba cylinders from that season include items from Lucia di Lammermoor (March 2 and 18), Romeo et Juliette (March 9, with closing announcement by Mapleson), La Traviata (March 16), and Faust (March 4 and 28).

From this season come also the only extant audio documentations of legendary tenor, Jean de Reszke, in bits from Le Cid (January 19), L'Africaine (March 15), Les Huguenots (March 11), Siegfried (March 19), and Lohengrin (March 29--de Reszke's final appearance at the Metropolitan). From March 13 dates an unsuccessful try at documenting Milka Ternina with Jean de Reszke in Tristan und Isolde, from which one of two cylinders still survives.

- 1902 - First recordings from catwalk 40 feet above the opera house stage, using oversized horn and special diaphragm. The three known photographs of Mapleson backstage with his apparatus, all taken on the same day, probably date from this year. Though curtailed in number (at least those that survive), recordings include Calvé in Carmen and Faust, Albert Alvarez in Le Cid, and a not very effective attempt to capture Milka Ternina (creator of the Tosca title role in London and New York) in the closing moments from that opera (February 1). Paderewski's opera, Manru, is heard for the first time in America (2 performances) and Mapleson records an episode from Act III, providing one of two cylinder documentations of soprano Fritzi Scheff. Staff pianist, Carl Muller, records four cylinders for Mapleson in March.

- 1903 - In terms of still extant cylinders, this season marks the peak of Mapleson's recording activity from Metropolitan Opera stage performances. Some 17 operas are represented, the most ambitious coverage being that of the February 7 Lohengrin with Gadski, Georg Anthes, Van Rooy, Robert Blass, and Luise Reuss-Belce, from which 10 cylinders survive. Nordica in Die Götterdämmerung, Gadski as Elisabeth in Tannhäuser, Eames with Emilio de Marchi (creator of the Cavaradossi role) in Tosca, Sembrich in La Fille du Régiment, Nordica in Tristan and Die Walküre, Sembrich and Carlo Dani in La Traviata, and Fritzi Scheff in Faust may be numbered among the major stars most effectively documented, to which may be added vivid ensemble scenes from Aida, Pagliacci, Ernani, Die Meistersinger, and Die Walküre. The two performances of Ero e Leandro by Metropolitan Opera conductor-composer, Luigi Mancinelli, on March 4 and 14 appear to mark the end of Mapleson's recording of operatic performances, based on the evidence of surviving cylinders. The first of Lionel's two sons, Louis A. Mapleson, is born in this year.
- 1904 - Audio evidence from surviving cylinders points to sporadic recording activity on Mapleson's part, chiefly from Sunday evening concerts at the opera house. The orchestral repertoire on five cylinders accords with items noted in Metropolitan Opera programs in January and February of 1904.
- 1905 - Alfred John Mapleson born. He was to succeed his father as Metropolitan Opera Librarian in 1938.
- 1909 - The latest verified date from surviving evidence that can be ascribed to a Mapleson recording. From one of a series of "aural snapshots" that Mapleson appended to the end of 1901 cylinders by Melba and Jean de Reszke, we hear of a "windy walk on Brooklyn bridge" occurring on April 8, 1909!
- 1922 - Alfred John Mapleson becomes assistant to his father at the Metropolitan Opera library.
- 1935 - First published mention of the Lionel Mapleson cylinder recordings: New Yorker magazine Talk of the Town, December 28, 1935.
- 1937 - First mention in book format of Mapleson cylinder recordings, including also reference to their worn condition: Backstage at the Opera by Rose Heylbut and Aimée Gerber; Crowell, New York, 1937.
- William H. Seltam, secretary of the International Record Collectors' Club (IRCC) in Bridgeport, Conn., is made aware by Olive Fremstad of the Mapleson treasures; and with the help of a letter from Geraldine Farrar, following IRCC's first successful issue of discs processed from cylinder originals (Blanche Arral), Seltam persuades Lionel Mapleson to lend two cylinders for experimental purposes.
- December 21. Lionel S. Mapleson dies at the age of 72.

1938 - Alfred John Mapleson succeeds to his late father's post as Metropolitan Opera Librarian. Arrangements are made for acquisition by Seltsam for IRCC of the 120 cylinders remaining at the Metropolitan Opera library.

George K. Bishop and Ira Glackens, at Seltsam's request, undertake to catalog, number, and individually describe the 120 cylinders received. All but a dozen or so of the operatic items are identified by title, performer, and date from cylinder container notations and/or from slips accompanying the cylinders. Glackens's summary of the report is published in the November 1938 issue of The Gramophone (England) as The Mapleson Collection. The poor condition of the cylinders is dwelt on at length, as is their unique documentary value.

Two major items on the Mapleson cylinders are published in the U.S.: A Sunday New York Times music section article (March 6) by Olin Downes, in which he also cites the Heylbut & Gerber Backstage at the Opera commentary on the cylinders, and an article in Hobbies magazine, April issue, written by Seltsam's friend and attorney, William D. Whalen--The Mapleson Collection--in which he describes the background of the collection and its acquisition by IRCC, as well as plans for processing and issuing discs.

1939 - First IRCC 78 rpm shellac disc issues from Mapleson cylinders: Melba (but see 1968 below), Jean de Rezske, Nordica.

Additional Mapleson cylinders, not part of the Metropolitan Opera library holdings at the time of Lionel Mapleson's death, are brought to light by one H.B. Bretnall in Brooklyn. G. Lauder Greenway, then with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and later Chairman of the Board of the Metropolitan Opera, arranges for the purchase of 12 for The New York Public Library.

1940 - Under the title, Ghosts for Sale, published in the December issue of Opera News, Philip L. Miller of the New York Public Library's Music Division, describes the 12 cylinders acquired by the Library and plans for eventual issue in disc format.

1941 - IRCC 78 rpm shellac disc issues from the Mapleson cylinders now total 26 items. Further publication is cut short by wartime materials restrictions. Seltsam devotes the war years to compilation of his monumental Metropolitan Opera Annals. Plans by The New York Public Library for its own disc issues reach the stage of transfer to lacquers of all 12 of its cylinders by the Library of Congress sound recording laboratory during February, with Jerome B. Wiesner as audio engineer. Three cylinders are broken in the process (items from Tristan und Isolde - 1903, a Faust final trio, and the Melba Romeo et Juliette Valse); but fortunately, complete contents remain intact in lacquer disc format.

- 1943 - New York Public Library disc publication plans are deferred for duration of the war.
- 1948 - IRCC resumes publication activity, which includes agreement for issue of the New York Public Library cylinders, out of which six are selected for 78 rpm shellac release.
- 1955 - IRCC publishes first issues from Mapleson cylinders in LP format, which benefit from equipment improved and updated by engineer John Raynor. Major reviews appear subsequently in the magazines The Gramophone (England) by Desmond Shawe-Taylor and in High Fidelity by James C. Hinton.
- 1957 - February 11. TIME Magazine publishes in its music section a full-scale article on IRCC's work with the Mapleson cylinders and its LP issues.
- 1958 - Well-known antique recordings collector and writer, Aida Favia-Artsay, acquires 10 heretofore unknown Mapleson cylinders, said to be from the same source as those obtained by The New York Public Library nearly 20 years before.
- 1959 - Long Island collector Henry Herrold publishes an LP limited edition disc, Met Stars, 1901-1903, including 9 out of the 10 Favia-Artsay Mapleson group.
- 1960 - The New York Public Library, following arrangements made by G. Lauder Greenway, acquires the 10 Favia-Artsay Mapleson cylinders.
- 1961 - The Mapleson Cylinders by Canadian scholar-collector, John Stratton, is published in The Record Collector (England) July/August issue, comprising the first full itemization and status summary of the collection as of that date.
- Helen White Mapleson dies December 12, age ninety-one.
- 1962 - The New York Public Library, through the efforts of G. Lauder Greenway, acquires the William H. Seltsam/IRCC cylinders, with the understanding that IRCC retains publication rights during Seltsam's lifetime. The five boxes of cylinders are delivered on April 12, there being 98 remaining of the original 122 acquired by Seltsam in 1937/38--a fact not discovered until the summer of 1981 when the Bishop-Glackens report was discovered among the IRCC papers in Bridgeport. It also was discovered that many of the annotated cylinder containers and slips from which Bishop and Glackens had gotten their information had disappeared in the interim.
- 1967 - Shortly after assuming charge of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, David Hall accepts an offer from John Stratton (see 1961) to undertake a detailed visual inspection of the 119 cylinders

held by the Library (one from the Library's original batch had been broken beyond salvage in 1941 at the Library of Congress). The resulting report indicated substantial discrepancies with regard to enumeration and identification, particularly with reference to the Ira Glackens 1938 article in The Gramophone--these to be resolved eventually only by direct audition of the cylinders themselves and of the Library of Congress lacquers from the three then known to be broken.

By this time, 73 of the 119 cylinders have seen public issue--64 on the IRCC label, 9 on Herrold. Shortly after the Stratton-Hall inspection-inventory, all the Library of Congress lacquer recordings from the Mapleson cylinders are transferred to magnetic tape, and made available for on-premises listening. These include three unissued items; the Melba Roméo et Juliette valse, part 1 of the 1903 Nordica-Anthes Tristan und Isolde love duet, and a Faust final trio with partial encore.

Recorded Sound (British Institute of Recorded Sound) publishes its July issue, The Recordings of Jean de Reszke by John Stratton, devoted to an analysis of the Mapleson cylinders both verified and ascribed to the famous tenor.

- 1968 - Robert C. Carneal, Chief Engineer at the Library of Congress Sound Recordings Section, together with David Hall and Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives audio engineer, Sam Sanders, undertake intensive investigation of means to improve quality and assurance of safety in the transfer of wax cylinders to tape.

December 27. William H. Seltsam dies, bequeathing his effects and IRCC holdings to his longtime associates, Glendon R. Good and George Laviolette.

Recorded Sound (British Institute of Recorded Sound) publishes in its July issue The Mapleson Cylinder of 'A ce mot' from Les Huguenots (Meyerbeer) by John Stratton. Forceful argument is advanced in favor of attributing the performance to Suzanne Adams rather than to Melba, as had been the case since 1938.

- 1969 - On newly developed cylinder playback equipment, the Library of Congress Recording Laboratory undertakes a trial transfer to tape one of the New York Public Library's Mapleson cylinders--a portion of the Immolation Scene from Die Götterdämmerung with Nordica. Results, including varied frequency equalizations, are not sufficiently conclusive to warrant an attempt to transfer the 118 other cylinders.
- 1978 - Wilfried Zahn of the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Frankfurt-am-Main, demonstrates at the Washington, D.C. meeting of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections examples of his restoration work with early wax cylinder recordings, using phase-differential techniques. Zahn is invited to help with the Mapleson cylinders, and a trial is agreed to, using the three intact cylinders of

the Faust final trio, the Marguerites being Melba (1901), Calvé (1902), and Suzanne Adams (1903). The resulting tape from Frankfurt leads to a serious consideration of having the Maplesons processed in Germany. However, risks in terms of shipment and customs complications are considered too great.

- 1979 - Tom Owen assumes the post of Sound Engineer at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound. Following a complete renovation of the sound restoration facilities to include the newest developments in the areas of transient noise suppression (Packburn), refined filtering-equalization technology, and real time audio spectrum analysis, it is agreed that with a properly designed cylinder playback apparatus, the Maplesons can be transferred to tape in something approaching definitive fashion at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives.

Following the Chicago meeting of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections, Arthur Shifrin, after giving an impressive demonstration of sound restoration techniques, is invited to design and construct for the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives a special cylinder playback machine, which after further modification by the Archives becomes the cylinder-to-disc transfer vehicle for the Mapleson Cylinder Project.

- 1980 - The Shifrin cylinder playback apparatus is delivered to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives and intensive research is undertaken by Tom Owen into all aspects of acoustic recording technology and into the chemistry of wax cylinder manufacture and the effects of long-term storage.
- 1981 - February/March. A trial run of 18 cylinders is transferred to tape at 164 rpm mandrel speed. Analysis indicates need for further equipment modification and change to a 184 rpm speed standard.

May 12/June 22. In the course of 16 working sessions tape transfer work is completed for all Mapleson cylinder recordings held by the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives. This includes 117 intact cylinders, two broken but partially playable cylinders and their intact transfers on 1941 Library of Congress lacquers, trial tapes done by Robert Carneal (1969) and by Wilfried Zahn (1978), the 78 rpm discs done by IRCC, and the LP discs done by IRCC and by Henry Herrold. This required 31 reels of 1/4" magnetic tape at 15 ips recording speed. With but 11 exceptions all transfers are at 184 rpm mandrel speed. These exceptions required a 164 rpm speed or lower to avoid equalization problems in final pitching. In most instances, the 184 rpm speed standard kept pitch deviations within a 1-step range above or below that of the printed music, based on an A-440 pitch standard. "Flat" and "Processed" transfers for each of the cylinders documenting Metropolitan Opera vocal artists.

July/November. Tapes are edited into rational program order, following an alphabetic sequence by opera title; and with a few

exceptions published in order of performance within each opera. Three research tapes for on-premises listening availability are planned: (a) all processed takes; (b) all "flat" takes; (c) all transfers done prior to the 1981 Rodgers and Hammerstein series. Investigation is begun as to the feasibility of public issue of the processed takes with selected items for tapes (b) and (c), with the 1983 Metropolitan Opera centennial celebration as target date.

This period also has been devoted to the assembling of as complete documentation as possible on both the history and provenance of the Mapleson cylinders and on their physical characteristics. In addition to the New York Public Library business and research files and all previously published literature, virtually everyone still surviving who may have worked with the Mapleson cylinders from 1937-on has been reached by letter, telephone, or in person. These include close associates of William H. Seltsam and Lionel Mapleson's son, Alfred. By far the most valuable fruit of this research was the discovery by Seltsam's associate, George Laviolette, of the George K. Bishop-Ira Glackens 1938 inventory and report, which has made it possible to account for all of the 122 cylinders acquired by Seltsam in 1937-38. Work is in progress on a tabular summary covering all 144 cylinders thus far known to have been extant from 1937 to the present.

Two technical papers dealing in whole or in part with the Rodgers and Hammerstein Mapleson cylinder project have been given at Audio Engineering Society conventions during 1981, one by Tom Owen at the spring convention in Hamburg, Germany (AES Preprint 1737/X-3), the other by Tom Owen and John C. Fesler at the New York fall convention (AES Preprint 1854/E-1).

In addition to the present ARSC Journal article, a full scale historical study in two parts, including full listing and details on each cylinder is scheduled for publication in Recorded Sound (British Institute of Recorded Sound) for 1981-82.