

THE NEW EDISON CYLINDER CATALOG

Reviewed by Raymond R. Wile

Koenigsberg, Allen. Edison cylinder records, 1889-1912; with an illustrated history of the phonograph. New York, Stellar Productions, 1969. 159 p. illus. (Available from Allen Koenigsberg, 1532 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11230 - \$12.95 ppd.)

This is at least the third or fourth attempt to prepare a catalog of the two-minute Edison cylinders and it is the best by far. The first was the pioneering effort of the late Dr. Duane D. Deakins and was admittedly a preliminary edition. At the time of its publication I reviewed it with an enthusiasm that has not lessened. Dr. Deakins' planned revisions were terminated by his untimely death. In his introduction Mr. Koenigsberg acknowledges his debt to Dr. Deakins. The second was the numerical catalog compiled by Sydney N. Carter and Major H.H. Annand in 1964/65. I have found the Carter-Annand catalog useful when my own research has extended back into the cylinder period. Although I always make it a point to check the accuracy of any citation I use, I have not had enough cylinder references to really check the accuracy of this catalog. The authors were in error when they listed their scope as extending from 1889-1912. Actually the list begins with the introduction of the block system of numbering in 1896. Another catalog is the numerical listing which is currently appearing in the magazine The New Amberola Graphic. With such a large group of predecessors the catalog at hand had to be something special and it is! A large amount of information is receiving its first publication in this superb work which is so obviously a labor of love.

The catalog proper contains the following features: 1) a brief history of the Edison involvement with the phonograph during the "two-minute" period; 2) a numerical and chronological index from 1896-1912; 3) an outline of the Edison block system of numbering; 4) several indexes of artists; 5) an index of records alphabetically arranged by artist; 6) a title index; 7) a transcription of a document from the Edison Historical Site - The First Book of Phonograph Records; 8) North American's first catalog; 9) North American's numerical series (incomplete); 10) an index of the Edison concert cylinders (5"); 11) and numerous label and record slip illustrations.

The introduction is accurate, and well written. It is welcome to encounter, for a change, an historically accurate account of the early phonograph activities of Thomas A. Edison. The catalog section is a remarkable achievement. I spent several hours checking its listings against catalogs that I own from the 1904-12 period. The total result of all of this labor was the location of one small error - the misattribution of a duet to Harvey Hindermeyer and Thomas Chalmers instead of Donald Chalmers. This also means that Donald Chalmers is missing from the artist listings. Other than this omission I found the artist listings exhaustive and quite complete. The listing of artist pseudonyms is valuable and I found a few with which I was not heretofore familiar.

The actual catalog section does present some problems for the unwary user. These problems fall into two categories - 1) the use of generic sections for solo instrumental records and 2) the lack of cross references for duets. Thus the user will find references to the Ossman Banjo Trio but will find solos by Mr. Ossman only under the generic heading-Banjo Solos. This can be compensated for by looking in the artist listing and determining the instrumental specialty of the artist. But this is awkward. With duets the problem is more serious. The catalog contains over fifty duet combinations, each listed by the name of the first artist. Unless the user prepares his own cross references he will of necessity have to check the entire catalog in order to ascertain if he has located the entire output of a particular artist.

The problem of "remakes" has not been solved by the author. The National Phonograph Co. often found it necessary to remake its master records. Where the original artist was available there is no problem for the researcher. Where he was not available the Company would hire another artist to re-do the record - but it would appear with the same issue number. Mr. Koenigsberg indicates that the problem exists but, except in a few cases, does not solve it. To give an example of the practice (but during the disc period) record 82516 appeared at various times with three different groups of artists. Because it is so difficult to discover if a record was remade I am sure that collectors would be doing a great service to call any such instances to Mr. Koenigsberg's attention.

The catalog title is a little inaccurate since it contains only Edison domestic series (except in the case of the Concert-5" cylinders). For the foreign listings the user must still rely on the Carter-Annand listings (volumes 4-7). I checked with Mr. Koenigsberg and he indicated that if he were successful with the present catalog he might supplement it with the other listings.

The North American listings, and the First Book of the Phonograph listings are extremely valuable since so little has survived from that period. At least we can now have some picture of what was being done in the early 1890's.

The cylinder release date chart is extremely useful for the careful researcher since it does provide a method through which cylinder recording dates can be approximated. Little documentary material has survived concerning two-minute cylinder recording dates except Cash Book entries. Through the comparison of release information with Cash Book entries we can arrive at a probable recording date for many of the cylinders after 1904.

Nothing in this review is intended to be unduly critical - the work is much too ably done. It is a superb job - the by-product of thorough scrutiny. As a sample of book production the catalog is one to delight a librarian's heart. Its cover is washable and its paper is long life, acid free, titanium oxide 70 lb. stock. This catalog was obviously meant to endure! A plastic binding was used so that future revisions might be easily snapped into place. I know the cost of book production since I hope to issue a complete Edison