

Book Reviews

teachers, and fans alike will benefit from the information available in *Laughter On Record and Film, Television, and Stage Music on Phonograph Records*. But with a few additions, these good works could become great ones. *Reviewed by B. Lee Cooper*

HIS MASTER'S VOICE / LA VOCE DEL PADRONE: The Italian Catalogue. A Complete Numerical Catalogue of Italian Gramophone Recordings made from 1898 to 1929 in Italy and elsewhere by The Gramophone Company Ltd. Compiled by Alan Kelly, with the cooperation of EMI Music Archive. Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1988. 462 pps.

It seems hard to realize that over fifty years have passed since the publication of the first editions of Julian Morton Moses' *Record Collector's Guide* (New York: 1936) and Robert Bauer's *Historical Records* (Milan: 1937). Thus, it has been at least 50 years since this writer began, in a very amateurish way, the attempt to revise and correct these early record collecting bibles, and 42 years since results from that effort were seen in the 1947 publication of Bauer's *The New Catalogue of Historical Records*. Such corrections and revisions were based on old catalog listings, records located in private collections, and "finds" reported in such periodicals as *Hobbies* (USA) and *The Gramophone* (UK).

Working with G&T/HMV catalog and matrix numbers, it became obvious that they were assigned according to some well-established codes which inquisitive collectors began trying to sort out from the evidence at hand. Unfortunately, similar interest did not seem to be a part of the make up of the self-appointed doyen of British collectors, P. G. Hurst, who conducted the monthly "Collector's Corner" in *The Gramophone*. He touched briefly on the matter of the language code for Gramophone Co. catalog numbers in the June 1931 issue of that periodical, but in the same issue noted "the matrix numbers have so far completely baffled me and I should be most obliged to any reader who could supply the key." Aside from a single repeated request for reader assistance in the August issue of the same year, no further word about these basic concepts ever again appeared in his columns, which ran through March 1937. In spite of the fact that Fred Gaisberg of the Gramophone Co. still could be consulted, and even supplied an occasional letter to Hurst's column, no one was interested enough to ask the one real authority to contribute a full explanation of the G&T/HMV catalog and matrix numbering systems.

Looking back, in his 1946 book, *The Golden Age Recorded*, Hurst did admit that some of the "Collector's Corner" discussions were conducted "at times with greater enthusiasm than accuracy," a major understatement! In his first column (May 1931) Hurst informed his readers that "it may be news to some that, although their original labels stated they were recorded in Milan, Caruso did, with the exception of the *Mattinata*, make his 'Milan' recordings in London." He states that the 12" recording of "Mi par udir ancora," copies of which are clearly marked with a Gramophone Co. matrix number, had been made by Victor! He further informs us that the May 1, 1909 Gadski-Homer duets were recorded in 1916! Some of his "authoritative" statements unfortunately have become fixed, by repetition, in the literature, in spite of having been discredited by later indisputable research. On the other hand, others of his pronouncements (e.g., in April 1934, that it was "an open secret that [the name of Enrico di Primo] was a pseudonym for Caruso") were quickly expunged before any serious harm was

done. Without quite admitting that he was in a large part responsible, he also stated in his 1946 book, "As the infant cult [of record collecting] began to feel its legs, it did what many other infants had done--it tried to run before it had learnt properly to walk, and this progress was marked by the (generally untimely) appearance of embryo books--or more properly catalogs--intended as guides to collectors.... The results were not happy." To expand on a theme initiated some time ago by Mr. Kelly, workers in the field, like Robert Bauer and those including the present writer who spent long hours helping him, were akin to dilettantes dabbling in archaeological matters by collecting pot shards rather than approaching their researches in a professional manner and building a solid scientific archaeological foundation. In short, the cart had gotten in front of the horse!

It wasn't until Mr. Kelly and his associates, John F. Perkins and John Ward, undertook a full explanation of the early Gramophone Co. mysteries in two articles published in *The Record Collector* (Vol. 21: 11 & 12, [March 1974]; Vol. 23: 3 & 4, [May 1976]) that the full story was told in print. It is because these two specific references are not noted in the Bibliography for the volume under review that I give them here, as they are important background not only for the present work but to establish this first volume in a framework of other volumes to which we can hopefully look forward. Together, all are needed for a complete understanding of the full span of the recording history of The Gramophone Co.

By way of a very much over-simplified introduction to establish the present work in its company-wide context, it must be pointed out that the early recording activities of The Gramophone Co. were undertaken by a team of travelling "experts" who spread from the company's London office throughout Europe, Africa, and parts of Asia with portable recording equipment. Each would set up temporary "studios" in major cities, and would record all manner of "talent" from local bands, cabaret singers, and street musicians to opera and concert singers. They would ship their wax plates back to the central factory, located in Hanover, and move on to a new location. Each technician maintained his own numbering system for these waxes, which numbers were entered on log sheets sent to the factory. Each of the experts was assigned individual code letters for the products of his work; the factory then placed satisfactory recordings in certain basic classifications which were coded in an elaborate system of catalog numbers. These first assigned the recorded material to number blocks by language: 10,000 Oriental; 20,000 Russian; 30,000 French; 40,000 German; 50,000 Italian; 60,000 Spanish. Then, within these blocks, internal blocks were set up to indicate the type of selection, band, orchestra, vocal, along with finer designations such as male or female solos, duets. Thus, catalog number 52000 is a 10" male solo in Italian; 052000 is a 12" male solo in Italian; 54000 is a 10" duet in Italian; 054000 is a 12" duet in Italian; 32076 is a 10" male solo in French; 032076 is a 12" male solo in French.

It is important to note that the assigned catalog numbers were a classification dealing with the selection involved, and carried no implication as to where or when each was actually recorded. Thus, in the last example given above, 32076 was a Renaud recording made in Paris in 1901 (matrix 711-G), whereas 032076 was a Gramophone Co. catalog number assigned to an imported Victor matrix (C-6236) recorded in French by De Gogorza in the United States in 1908!

As far as matrix numbers are concerned, it has been noted that each expert was given identifying letters, but if recordings made at the same session were in different languages they might bear adjacent matrix numbers but would of necessity have

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unrelated catalog numbers. Thus matrix 1124e and 1125e were numbers assigned to recordings of the American baritone Clarence Whitehill, both recorded by Will Gaisberg in Bayreuth in 1904, but one being in German was given catalog number 2-42931 and appears in the German Catalog; the other, being in French, was listed in the French Catalog as 3-32223.

Once again, the above is an over simplified version of a very complex business to attempt to set the stage for this new book by Kelly which lists the G&T/HMV "Italian Catalogue" from 1898 to 1929. The reason for the 1929 cutoff is that in this year the entire numbering system which has been described above underwent a complete revision, and a continuation of listing past this date will require an entirely different format. As can be seen from the above emasculated examples, the titles "French" or "German" or "Italian" Catalog does not mean lists of selections recorded only in those countries. Also, the present volume is not simply a re-printing of some "Italian Sales Catalogue" previously issued by The Gramophone Co. No such catalog has ever existed before, for this is made up of a compilation of recordings published and withdrawn in a never ending complex stream over a period of 30 years. It is thus a *complete* listing of all catalog numbers (together with their associated matrix numbers and recording dates where known) assigned to the so-called "Italian List" from whatever date or origin. It thus contains recordings made in the Italian language or of Italian music recorded in Germany, England, France, the United States (by Victor) or elsewhere. Some of these recordings actually may never have been offered for sale in Italy.

The main catalog has been divided into three sections: a) recordings issued on the Gramophone label from 1899 to 1929; b) recordings issued on the Zonophone label from 1903 to 1909 and 1914-15; and c) recordings issued on the Gramophone Green label, which replaced the Zonophone label. Each entry gives under the original catalog number, the matrix number, the date of recording when available, the name of the artist(s) involved, and the title of the selection. These are followed by alternative catalog and coupling numbers for those which appeared in double-faced form.

In addition to an informative introduction, the book contains a number of valuable tables which detail the recording technicians' names and their assigned code letters, Gramophone and Zonophone number blocks assigned to each country, and a summary table of the Italian Catalog numbers showing types of recordings in each sub-block. There is a table listing the double-faced initial letters and label color for not only those records listed in the Italian Catalog, but also where each of these series was actually pressed. A most important table gives the "diaries" of the various experts for Italian recording sessions, together with the actual matrix numbers cut by each, with session dates and location. The book concludes with a complete Artist Index.

Here, then, is a truly comprehensive listing based on information which can be found in the files of The Gramophone Co. for the "Italian Catalogue." These data have been expanded from time to time by additional bits of information gained from all manner of published discographies and supplied by collectors. It can be said with some authority that further "official" information from company files relative to these records almost certainly will not be forthcoming. This work will truly stand as the ultimate source from this time forward.

While the official files must, as always, be the starting place for recording research, careful examination of the actual artifact can often produce data not set forth in the master files. There are always some surprises. For this writer, as an example, it came

as a revelation that Apollo Granforte's recording of the Fascist hymn "Giovinezza," instead of having been made in Italy as one might suppose, was actually recorded in Small Queen's Hall (relayed by wire to recording machines in Gloucester House) in London, with an English orchestra and conducted by the Gramophone Company's "house" conductor, George W. Byng. And it came as a surprise to Alan Kelly when I reported to him that I actually had two published takes of this recording (when the files indicated that only one had been issued) and that a chorus was present, since this is not mentioned in the files, although noted on the label. Thus, there are always bits and pieces of information left for the collector to discover. But now at last we have a proper place to note them in systematic fashion.

The early works of Moses, Bauer, R. D. Darrell, Clough and Cuming, John R. Bennett and many others, who have labored hard and long in producing catalogs and lists of records with many varied formats and encompassing many different perimeters, have long served collectors and researchers. Many of these works will continue to be of limited value in the future. But the day of the hit-or-miss patchwork gathering of miscellaneous information about recordings with vaguely fixed scopes and limits will come to an end as works such as Kelly's appear. With the publication of this book, we have an example of how the horse and the cart have finally been put in their correct relative positions. No doubt this definitive and comprehensive listing of the entire production of the Italian Catalog of The Gramophone Co. will become a model for further volumes, and eventually we will have parallel works for the English, French, German, Russian and other Gramophone Co. catalogs.

Eventually these works should be carried at least to the end of the 78 rpm era. The work of Karleric Liliedahl published by the Finnish Institute for Recorded Sound and entitled *The Gramophone Co.: Acoustic Recordings in Scandinavia and for the Scandinavian Market*, (Helsinki: 1977) should be noted as a major contribution to this effort. This same Finnish Institute has been responsible for the publication of a number of important works dealing principally with materials of local interest. Much good basic work has already been published on Edison cylinders and discs; that which was compiled from company files is by far the best. Published material on Pathé suffers from a lack of available company documents, a lack which will very possibly limit future work on many other smaller companies. Readers will surely be aware of *The Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings*, the third volume of which will soon be in the hands of the publisher. Work is progressing on similar research about both English and American Columbia, and American Zonophone. The organization of the factory data from the files of Fonotipia is in progress. The talent of many collectors now seems directed toward eventual publication of fundamental research which will provide accurate information for future discographies in every possible field. Such work should be encouraged. It is basic to the preservation and use of all recordings worthy of being looked upon as historical documents. All serious collectors will welcome Alan Kelly's outstanding contribution to the professional documentation of a large segment of recorded history, and support this fine work and that of the future by proving to the commercial publishers who have gambled on our efforts that the publication of such research is viable commercially. *Reviewed by William R. Moran* 