
LETTERS

The *ARSC Journal* encourages signed, typed, comment on current issues and matters of general interest to association members. Letters beyond 250 words may be edited to fit space. Letters can be sent to the editorial office.

To the Editor:

This is a somewhat tardy response to Mr. John W. N. Francis' article *The Gilbert & Sullivan Operettas on 78s* (*ARSC Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1988-1989), pp. 24-81) which I found most enjoyable and useful--especially since Vol. I of "Voices of the Past" rather cavalierly listed the early concerted recordings merely as "Sullivan Operatic Party," with no other data. I have a couple of odds and ends which might be of interest.

First, respecting the 1906 *Mikado* excerpts: I have a disc which wasn't in the list, but was presumably recorded by Fred G. on August 28, 1906, like 8793b ("Our great Mikado"). It is 8797b: "See how the Fates," catalogue no. 4607, credited to "The Sullivan Operatic Party." I don't know when it was issued; there must have been some sort of logic behind the distinction between the 4400 and 4600 numbers (see Will G.'s 1908 *HMS Pinafore*, which I'd guess were recorded in mid-1907). However, my 4607 has a G&T label, and was "reproduced in Hanover," so logically it belongs to at least the single-sided *Mikado* set.

Second, regarding the acoustic D sets, and not of earth-shaking importance: HO2812af has both "Our great Mikado" and "Young man, despair," so the second verse of the former is omitted; the two HMV electric sets separate them, but "catch up" by Side 10. In the solo part of HO4712-2AF, Calverley (Dawson) sings: "Set them to simmer, and [mumble] Dragoon" instead of "...take off the scum" (though he gets the catalogue of names right). Cc4745-2 includes "The battle's roar," but 2B1455-1 goes straight from "My boy, you may take it" to "If well his suit"; the Savoy company decided to omit "The battle's roar" sometime in the late '20s. Finally, for a very brief period in 1925 Victor issued the *HMS Pinafore* set; a friend of mine with whom I've lost touch told me ten years ago that he had acquired it, and that it was on 55000 blue labels like the *Mikado* set. I can't find the paper on which I noted the numbers, but undoubtedly Bill Moran would have them.

I have all nine acoustic D sets, which I bought in a record store in London for about ten shillings a set in 1952; evidently they'd been traded in on the then new (and not wonderful) Decca recordings. I also have all the HMV electrics, but in Victor slide-automatic pressings. I wish I had the Odeon sets! *C.F. Kerry Gaulder, Wilmington, MA*

To the Editor:

The following are minor errata found in my article "The Audiophile's Guide to Phonorecord Playback Equalizer Settings,"

(*ARSC Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1988-1989), pp. 14-23)

1.) p. 17, 9th entry should read "Decca FFRR (1953)"

2.) p. 18, Guidelines, 3rd line, should read "(NAB vs. LP: 32 Hz +5"

In response to Mr. Stosich's letter (*ARSC Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1988-1989), p. 221), he is quite correct by implying that my article was not a catalog of available equipment. Instead, equipment mentioned was personally acquired by me and the writing based on its actual use. As a result, typical consumer selection criteria (e.g. affordable price, high quality, and reliable performance) were used in making a choice.

My article stated, "The playback equalization settings listed here are based on new research into the technical literature." This means if the information was found in the typically refereed electronic, engineering, broadcast book and journal literature, as far back as 1925-26, it was studied and evaluated for corroboration and possible consideration. Some of the best examples of this are references to the following authors (see my article, p. 21): G. A. Briggs; P. C. Goldmark, et al.; F. Langford-Smith; and R. C. Moyer. The information about Decca FFRR was a puzzle up to the moment of publication because there has been for some years a mystery as to what is the proper setting. G. A. Briggs (1953, p. 285) indicated a Decca microgroove recording characteristic since matched by many American playback preamps of the era, whereas *Wireless World* (Jan. 1951, s. 10) showed a much different curve. A telefacsimile letter to Tony Griffiths of Polygram and a lapse of many months did not result in a clarification, so I cited both curves. If others can document with proof the actual Decca FFRR microgroove recording characteristic(s) before RIAA for a given record number and year, I and fellow audiophiles will be most grateful. *James R. Powell, Jr., Portage, MI*

To the Editor:

ARSC members who read with interest the recent reviews of Leopold Godowsky's recordings (as reissued on CD by APR) and the biography by Jeremy Nicholas, *Godowsky: The Pianist's Pianist*, will be happy to learn of a new recording project to issue on compact disc all of Godowsky's piano music. Dante Records, based in Paris, is recording Godowsky's solo piano literature in performances by Geoffrey Douglas Madge, using a 1926 Steinway grand piano.

The first three issues comprise the following:

CD 8903 (2 Discs) - 53 Studies after Chopin, Numbers 1-25

CD 8905 (2 Discs) - 53 Studies after Chopin, Numbers 26-48

CD 8907 - Grand Sonata in E Minor

These recordings were released in the United States in March, 1990, by Koch

International, and should be available in better record stores. *Michael E. Rosenberg, Koch International, Oakland, CA*

To the Editor:

A slight error of fact in C.-P. Gerald Parker's excellent *Faust* essay in the *ARSC Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 177-81 seems to me to have broad implications for reissues of historical recordings. He notes of the *Musica Memoria* CD, "Busser omits the ballet entirely." Actually, it is the reissue which omits Busser's recording of the ballet--as did the earlier Club '99' reissue on three LPs. The performance originally released by the Gramophone Company and Victor on 40 78-rpm sides included the ballet music on sides 33-36 as part of the Act V, Walpurgis Night scene. Apparently, *Legendary Performances* has reissued this *Faust* recording with the ballet intact. The non-*Faustspielefeinschmecker* may well ask, "So what?"

We can pass lightly and quickly over the question of whether the ballet music *should* be included. The actual composer--possibly Leo Delibes--has not been conclusively identified, although it almost certainly wasn't Gounod. *Faust* approaches *Carmen* and *Hoffmann* in performing versions, and what to include or omit is decided in ways too numerous to tell--this writer suspects, for example, that the basis for the decision to omit the Witches Scene in the current Metropolitan Opera production is that the designer could not come up with a setting more hellish than those he did for the rest of the opera.

The thing which should concern ARSC is the preservation aspect. The 1931 Busser-Journet-Vezzani-et-al. performance is generally acknowledged to be a landmark recording. The performance deserves all the praise it has received over the years. The musicians and production team deliberately decided to include the ballet music in one of the more bulky sets issued during the 78 rpm era. If this performance is worthy to be perpetuated nearly 60 years later--and it is--why isn't it worth preserving intact? Even the well-known critic Conrad L. Osborne in a glowing, full page review of the Club '99' reissue in the July 1976 *High Fidelity* glossed over the omission of this part of the original recording in that reissue.

The farther we get in time and technology from the original form of the recordings being perpetuated in reissues, the harder it is for us to make direct comparisons. This is only to be expected, and we cannot all--even reviewers--have everything in every variant in our personal collections. This means an even greater need for the widespread availability of reference collections, but it also means that those of us who are concerned about the preservation of recorded sound performances should be highly demanding with respect to reissues of recordings and highly vocal about those which are in any respect deficient. *Elwood McKee, Rockville, MD*

To the Editor:

I thank Elwood McKee profusely for drawing attention to the omission of the ballet music from the Walpurgisnacht scene of the recording of Gounod's *Faust* under Busser's direction, which originally did include that delightful part of the score. It has been several years since I have had access to a copy of Busser's recording on the original 78 rpm discs, and I simply assumed (which I obviously should not have) that the *Musica Memoria* CD set represented the entire recording.

The question of whether Gounod really wrote the ballet music or not, a somewhat thorny one, is beside the point. So is the matter of whether or not the ballet in

the Walpurgisnacht scene generally should be included in a recording of the more-or-less complete opera. The whole point of continuing to make this consummately great recording of the opera available in a modern format is precisely the calibre of the performance. Busser's recording is every bit as notable for its orchestral and choral excellence as for the vocal soloists, Busser's conducting having wonderful character and atmosphere. This recording is an historic document of how French opera-making at its best could sound, and the integrity of the original recording should have been respected. I am perhaps even more outraged to learn of Musica Memoria's and Club 99's defacement of this recording than perhaps is Elwood himself. It is a classic case of the vocal fancier's philistinism, I would say! (It is mostly such people who run the specialty labels that release so many of these recordings, among whom count some a bit short-sighted about aspects of opera performances not directly related to "star" vocalists.) I have already noticed another CD reissue of Busser's performance, and more may follow, hopefully from E.M.I. itself, eventually. Perhaps one of the producers will "get it right."

This phenomenon, i.e., lack of respect to historic recordings' integrity, illustrates just how crucial is the work of archives such as those which participate in the Associated Audio Archives. It is indeed important to preserve 78 rpm, cylinder, and other recordings on older sound carrier media in their original form, so that there is easy recourse to the original issues for the listener who cares about how such worthy recordings were intended to be heard. It is also encouraging that these institutions for the most part take great pains to preservation-dub recordings with more respect for the probity of their contents. May they help raise the consciousness of both mainstream and specialty labels to finally make the injuries inflicted upon such great maestros as Muck and Busser in certain notable reissue efforts a thing of the past. *C.-P. Gerald Parker, Quebec, CANADA*

To the Editor:

In 1985 I addressed the ARSC membership on "The Search for Sonic Excellence: Thirties Shellac and Fifties Stereo." My message has remained constant: Sonic quality is paramount in music reproduction, likewise in musical instruments; no one knows yet how well any record or tape can sound; and historic masters must be treated with respect. I might add that we in audio, who partly administer those masters, are groping about in a largely unmapped field of inquiry where no standard of reproduction exists. Before anyone dares to liberate shelfspace by transferring bulky analogue mastertapes and 78 rpm metals onto the latest floppy disc or whatever, it behooves us first to determine 1) how to play each type of recording best and 2) the robustness of the new storage media.

Taking the second point first, I refer to a recent German Institut für Rundfunktechnik white-paper on DAT, which discouraged its use for archival storage or repeated playings, and to JARSC for February 1989, where Steve Smolian echoes those findings for video tape cassettes. (And I hear that Sony/Columbia intends to transfer their 78 rpm masters to DAT and destroy the originals.) These facts have been known for awhile to insiders, but only recently reached print. Worse, speak to "real world" computer engineers--I recommend the experience--and they laugh in your face, when you ask whether information stored digitally on *any* magnetic tape will last 20 or 30 years. "You're lucky to get 10 years on *hard disc!*"

So digital masters must be retransferred periodically for safekeeping, since the digital domain yields to physical deterioration sooner than analogue—at least with present materials, error-correction codes and low data redundancy. As for CD MkI, just consider the so-called “laser rot” discovered in England after accelerated life-span testing, an established aerospace procedure, but widely unreported in America. Indeed, I recall the 1986 ARSC conference in the Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York City, where Philips representatives announced their increase in “guaranteed lifetime” for CDs from five years to ten. Bravo! Further, I have proof that CD designers grossly misunderstand the optical/digital interface. (For credentials, I am a Harvard-trained, although no-longer-practicing, optical physicist.) Finally, regarding the numerics of today’s PCM-digital audio, we have been hitched tight onto the foot of a rapidly rising technology curve. Thus a “New, Improved” CD MkII must exist already in the prototype lab, with Mk III on the drawing boards. Of course, future players will handle the old discs, too . . . just as we once had three-speed record changers.

Was it not ever thus? Fondly I recall RCA’s advert for their 7-inch 45 rpm discs: “For the first time, records completely distortion-free!”

Now to Point Number One, which requires lengthier discussion. But first let me say, audio practice uniquely joins craft and science in devotion to fine art. And presently almost every aspect is open-ended, so no one can tell for certain how to make any recording, old or new, sound best. That explains why audio draws so many talented people to “the High End.” *Why go low?* Unfortunately, most record reviewers and others listen over mass-produced “consumer electronics” and bantam-weight turntables. Worse, everyone is assaulted by Walkman units and “TV sound,” further eroding aural expectations. These items produce notes on pitch, or nearly, so they “make music” satisfactorily for the vast majority.

But really, they don’t. Consider the dynamic range *p* to *ppp*, vital to expression in classical music. Nuance in that region is very badly rendered by PCM digital, which performs to its impressive specifications only at high volume; unlike analogue, PCM-digital distortions actually increase as levels fall. Thus the process lacks subtlety in soft passages and eliminates reverberation because insufficient bits exist to do the job properly. So digital is great at being loud and Japanese gear sounds tolerable in the midrange, but until you hear 78s and early stereo LPs and master tapes played on an authentic “high-end” reproducer, you “ain’t heard nothin’ yet!” And only on such systems should the crucial decisions be made, about new recording techniques and equipment and how best to transfer masters—decisions that affect musical posterity.

Especially I am concerned about 78 rpm masters. I love 78s for their *great performances* and *great sound*. My favorite hobby is playing old 78s on “high-end” gear. What a revelation! The combination is so eccentric, I wonder whether anyone else has hit upon it. I scarcely bother with EQ and noise reduction; ultimately these count, but the physical instrument is paramount. To illustrate, 78 rpm stylus energy greatly exceeds the LP instance, due both to higher rotational velocity and wider groove excursion, so stylus cantilever and the tone-arm both must be *intelligently damped*. Even the surface below affects the sound and, not to seem goofy, *the wire* makes a difference too. Tall loudspeakers and long rooms then are necessary to assess the tremendous bass impact of 78s, and tubed electronics naturally make

every tube-cut record sound best. Until these very audible improvements are more widely experienced, who can say whether any particular "restoration" is truly satisfactory?

In addition I employ two proprietary devices that dramatically reduce "overcut distortion," allowing a smooth glide through the notoriously difficult Toscanini New York Philharmonic Beethoven Seventh. Also I apply a mild chemical treatment from Canada that much improves the "tone" of shellac, reduces surface noise and even helps suppress HMV crackle--all without electronic intervention! Finally I have devised new means to eliminate transient noise, employing LANs computer routines.

Other individuals have other techniques. Unfortunately, we lack effective means to unite our forces and develop conjointly the perfect process. Technically we remain segmented. Therefore I propose an agency of quasi-official stature (a new ARSC Committee?) to develop Sound Standards for Audio. This would disseminate information to help every restorationist treat our recorded legacy rightly, from the standpoints both of sonic quality and physical integrity. Perhaps it could also exercise a beneficent influence over the impersonal corporations who own nearly all the masters. Interested parties may reach me at the address given below.

Speaking for my beloved classics, and others, the masters on which immortal performances endure must not be abandoned or destroyed without a major effort undertaken to ascertain their ultimate fidelity. Moreover, the recording industry's precipitant rush to digital transfers must be forestalled, while so many questions of longevity remain unanswered. Personally and most emphatically, I refuse to leave this mortal groove without doing my utmost to rescue the historic masters and create new records through which every music-lover may hear them truly. That is my calling . . . and my call to all.

Finally, I have written a book entitled *The Wood Effect: Unaccounted Contributor to Error and Confusion in Acoustics and Audio*. It expands on some of the previous material, with over a dozen pages devoted to 78s. Mainly, however, it chases a phenomenon discovered by Mr. Charles Wood through the no-man's-land of "high fidelity." Easily heard (once understood), the Wood Effect nevertheless remains obscure, even among professionals, although it assists greatly in preparing masters for reissue, among other considerations. Not to appear self-congratulatory, but one reviewer called the book, "Fascinating . . . a *tour de force*." A second opined, "The author is both passionate and vociferous . . . The book is rich in examples and anecdotes, some hilarious, all instructional . . . A treasure trove of information worth much more than its nominal cost of \$7.95 . . ." A third said, "I have become a disciple of Mr. Johnsen's dissertation." *The Wood Effect* is available to ARSC members for \$6.50 postpaid from the Modern Audio Association, 23 Stillings Street, Boston MA 02210. Clark Johnsen, Boston, MA 🎧