
CURRENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

By Tim Brooks

“Current Bibliography” is an annotated index to research on recording history that has appeared recently in small circulation journals. It also includes news about those publications.

Articles indexed here must be in English, be reasonably substantive, and deal with *recording history*. Articles on musicology, sociology, or contemporary activities and reviews are not included. “W/D” or “discog.” indicates that the article was accompanied by something at least remotely resembling a discography.

Issues covered this time were received between September 1990 and March, 1991. If you contact one of these publishers or authors, please mention ARSC and “Current Bibliography.”

Notes

Another three bite the dust. *Whiskey, Women and...*, a fine historical rhythm and blues periodical from Dan Kochakian of Haverhill, Mass., has discontinued publication effective with issue no. 18/19 (Fall 1989) due to “the usual reasons of increased prices and decreased income.” *WWA* was originally published from c.1972-1975, then revived from 1982-1989, so maybe it will be back one day. But don't count on it. *Needle Time*, from England's Brian Rust, has expired for similar reasons after a five year run. The first indication that something was amiss came when I received the November, 1990 issue and noticed on the cover a reproduction of the label of Gennett 4699—“Farewell Blues.”

Then there's *JEMF Quarterly*, the pioneering country and folk research journal, forced to close its doors after more than 20 years. The *Quarterly* must hold the record for delayed publication; its final issue bears a nominal date of “Fall/Winter 1985,” a publication date of “Fall 1990,” and was received in February 1991. The issue is devoted to a review of the history of the now-defunct John Edwards Memorial Forum. UCLA, the JEMF's host institution, forced the sale of its assets when it failed to return a profit. Middle Tennessee State University will continue the work of the *Quarterly* in its own *American Vernacular Music*.

More encouraging is the story of *Sing Out!*, the well known folk music journal, which has “fought an uphill battle back to profitability in the past decade.” Its rebirth, and the new Sing Out Folk Music Resource Center, is described in the February 22, 1991 issue of *Goldmine* (p.6).

We welcome with this installment the new Australian discographical quarterly *Australasian Record and Music Review*, edited by Mike Sutcliffe.

DISCoveries has made good on its threat to publish a full issue consisting entirely of letters from readers (and, of course, ads). The big December 1990 number proved to be both fun and fact-filled, as the magazine's enthusiastic readership sounded off on every musical subject under the sun. (*DISCoveries'* editorial content has become quite wide ranging of late, with big bands and 1950s crooners complementing the familiar rock articles.) The "letters issue" promises to become an annual tradition.

Every Collector's Dream

A potential landmark announcement concerning the oldest recording in existence appears in the November 1990 issue of *The Sound Box*, the newsletter of the California Antique Phonograph Society. On the cover is a photograph of a tin foil phonograph built by Augustus Stroh in 1878 and modified by him in the early 1880s for experimental wax cylinder recording. The startling news is that on the mandrel is an actual recording, apparently from the early to mid 1880s—possibly which would make it the oldest playable recording in existence. The short article tells us only that it contains "a mixed program of voice and music." The machine and recording are owned by collector John Woodward.

Seen in Passing

The best title of recent months may well be found in *Goldmine* for October 5, 1990. Who wouldn't want to learn more about "Roy Head, the Man Who Bit Elvis' Leg"?

The best opening line, though, must go to the article on Nanci Griffith in the October 1990 *DISCoveries*, which begins, "Currently heading for the pinnacle of her career with no limit in sight, Nanci Griffith has performed the last twenty years in barrooms and concert halls around the world."

Best picture honors belong to *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 14 No. 2 for its full page shot of H-Bomb Ferguson, who looks very much like his name (after detonation).

Most unlikely article? No doubt the straight-faced history of the 101 Strings in the November 30, 1990 *Goldmine*. Included in the discography are several X-rated singles, including the infamous "Love at First Sight" in which a sensual female voice moans erotically as the Strings play blithely on.

Lies That Will Not Die - #3

Embarrassing errors continue to mar the pages of some of our most prestigious journals. *Popular Music and Society*, in a special blues issue (14:2), solemnly informs us that the phonograph was invented in 1887 and that Columbia Records was founded in 1899 (ten years too late in each case). It also notes that Columbia excluded black talent from its roster until the 1920s, when in fact Bert Williams, George W. Johnson and the Fisk University Jubilee Quartette were among the label's biggest sellers between 1890 and 1920; and that George W. Johnson was "the only black entertainer to record on cylinder" (at least half a dozen others did as well). Later, Sophie Tucker is said to have sold a million copies of "St. Louis Blues" in 1917, when she never even made such a record.

Then there's the current best-selling record industry expose *Hit Men* which tells readers that Columbia was cofounded by Alexander Graham Bell (a stretch, at best); that it spent "all but its first decade under William Paley" (he must have been older than we thought); and that the early 1950s were dominated by crooners like Andy Williams (he didn't have his first hit until 1956, well after the rock revolution was underway).

More insidious are errors that have long been accepted as fact by all of us, while we never noticed the little inconsistencies and illogicalities that render them suspect. One such seems to be the story that the first jazz record was recorded for Columbia by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band on January 30, 1917, a month before the same band waxed its first *issued* recording for Victor on February 26. The story goes that Columbia didn't realize what it had, so Victor rushed out its own ODJB sides which sold in huge quantities, and made musical history.

Brian Rust, in the July 1987 issue of the now-defunct *Needle Time*, published a short item noting that according to a careful examination of the Columbia files those ODJB sides were in fact recorded on May 31, 1917, long *after* the Victor date. This is contrary to practically every published reference of the last 40 years, including Rust's own *Jazz Records*, the standard reference in the field, as well as recent items in *DISCOVERIES* and *Record Finder*, among others. It also contradicts the standard biography of the pioneering band by H.O. Brunn (1960), which recounts the Columbia-first story in vivid detail.

I've checked the Columbia files myself, and Rust appears to be right (this time). Not only are the Columbia sides assigned May 1917 matrix numbers, but notations on the original cards strongly indicate that they were recorded then as well, not renumbered from some earlier trial.

It just goes to show that you never know when today's firmly established fact will become tomorrow's "whoops!" I bet you will see the appealing Columbia-first story repeated in print for many years to come, however.

Publications Listed

Antique Phonograph Monthly, 502 East 17th St., Brooklyn, NY 11226

Antiques & Collecting Hobbies, 1006 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago IL 60605

Australasian Record and Music Review, 15 Lowanna Ave., Baulkham Hills, NSW 2153, Australia

Bluegrass Unlimited, Box 111, Broad Run, VA 22014

DISCOVERIES, Box 255, Port Townsend, WA 98368

Echoes of the Past, Box 40, Agawam, MA 01001

Goldmine, 700 East State St., Iola, WI 54990

Hillandale News, c/o D.M. Field, Hon. Treasurer, City of London Phonograph & Gramophone Society, 116 Tanhouse Lane, Malvern Link, Worcs. WR14 1LG, England

Historic Record, The, 185 The Wheel, Ecclesfield, Sheffield S30 3ZA, England

Hobbies - see *Antiques & Collecting Hobbies*

IAJRC Journal, International Assoc. of Jazz Record Collectors, c/o Gil Erskine, P.O. Box 800, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

In The Groove, Michigan Antique Phonograph Society, 2609 Devonshire, Lansing, MI 48910

- JEMF Quarterly*, Center for Popular Music, Box 41, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 37132
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- Journal of Country Music*, Country Music Foundation, 4 Music Square East, Nashville, TN 37203
- Memory Lane*, 226 Station Rd., Leigh on Sea, Essex, SS9 3BS England
- Needle Time*, The Moorings, 50 Ulwell Road, Swanage, Dorset BH19 1LN, England
- New Amberola Graphic*, 37 Caledonia St., St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
- New Orleans Music*, Bayou Press Ltd., 117 High St., Wheatley, Oxon. OX9 1UE, England
- Popular Music & Society*, Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green, OH 43403
- Record Collector*, c/o Larry Lustig, 111 Longshots Close, Broomfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 5DU, England
- Record Collectors Monthly*, Box 75, Mendham, NJ 07945
- Record Finder*, Box 1047, Glen Allen, VA 23060
- Record Research*, 65 Grand Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11205
- Rhythm Rag*, 8 Oakmont Drive, Waterlooville, Portsmouth, Hants., PO8 8TH England
- Rockin' 50s*, 3022 56th St., Lubbock, TX 79413
- Sound Box, The*, Calif. Antique Phono. Society, Box 67, Duarte, CA 91010
- Soundtrack!*, c/o Roger Feigelson, P.O. Box 13835, Stanford, CA 94309
- Tailgate Ramblings*, 3608 35th St. NW, Washington, DC 20016
- Talking Machine Review*, 8 Weston Close, Dunchurch, Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 6QD, England
- Vintage Light Music*, 4 Harvest Bank Road, West Wickham, Kent, England

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- Mercury (1940s label), 5000-series, by Ed Novitsky, *Record Research* Jan 1991
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