

Bibliographic and Bibliothecal Considerations for Discographers

It is noted that discographical research, and writing about recorded sound, does not have wide distribution outside the collector community. Musicological publications frequently ignore such writing, even though it would be appropriate to topics in hand. It is suggested that this situation can be improved by authors, editors, and publishers in the discography field; a number of recommendations are offered that may enhance the readership of discographical writing. By following those recommendations, it is possible that discographers will also improve communication among themselves. In general, the recommendations include means of placing discographical writings in research libraries, of having them covered by mainstream indexes and bibliographic guides, and of rendering them more acceptable to scholars by improving their methodology.

After some 60 years of development, the science of discography has reached a high level of sophistication. Expert practitioners are producing publications, in journals and monographs, that deserve places in the universe of scholarship. And the field of discography – in which I include all studies concerning the history and technology of recorded sound – is now sufficiently complex and mature to stand among the traditional academic disciplines. Yet the work of discographers and scholars of recorded sound has been limited in its impact; it seems that discographers communicate with one another and influence one another, but do not often interact with researchers in related fields. In particular, I have observed the lack of communication between discography and a field of natural affinity, musicology (encompassing music history and theory). There is little evidence of scholarly partnership between these disciplines: musicologists do not seem to rely on discographical writing, and discographers do not seem aware of musicological writing. I believe some attention to bibliographic and bibliothecal matters on the part of discographers may bring about an enhanced connection between the two fields. A better connection with librarians might also follow.¹ Perhaps intracommunication among discographers would also be improved if certain changes were made in the typical *modus operandi*. By “bibliographic and bibliothecal” I mean that cluster of aspects that covers form of presentation, publication, and library elements. My purpose is to call attention to certain bibliographic areas where amelioration seems to be needed, and to suggest some practical approaches to more effective results.

For evidence of the disconnection between musical scholarship and discography, we may consult a standard work, the 20-volume *New Grove Dictionary of Music and*

Musicians.² There is a mere two-column entry for “Discography” in volume five. But neither recordings nor discographies are mentioned in various other articles that seem to call out for them, e.g., (from the same volume five), “Dixieland Jazz,” “Gaetano Donizetti” (which includes a three-column bibliography that has no discography), and “Double Bass.” In the article for Charles Dalmorès it is written that “gramophone records show that his powerful voice was used with much technical accomplishment and a sense of style” – but no record or list of records is cited. For singers in *Grove* there is sometimes a citation to a discography, at other times not. Finally on *Grove*: the encyclopedia has no individual articles for record firms. Another recent reference work gives even less attention (none, really) to the recorded heritage and its documentation: *The Oxford Companion to Musical Instruments*.³ I do not see any comment on recordings in the articles, and there are no discographies cited in the 800-item bibliography. One more case: the *Companion to Baroque Music*⁴ has no discographies and no attention to recordings anywhere in its otherwise excellent essays.

An examination of articles in 1993 issues of *Musical Quarterly*, *Music & Letters*, and *Journal of the American Musicological Society* reveals no citations to recordings or discographies in topics that would have benefitted from such citations (e.g., Irving Berlin); one such citation appeared in an essay on Henry Cowell. If authors in those journals do not include discographical writing in their scholarly apparatus, the reason may be that they are in fact unaware of its existence, or of its extent.

Such ignorance among scholars is easy to understand if we consider that the major outlets of discographical publication (again inclusive of all research in sound recording) are collector journals of limited circulation. Research libraries, where scholars do their work, are usually weak in holdings of the collector journals. For example, there is no complete run in the Chicago area libraries of *The Record Collector*, *Record Research*, or *Talking Machine Review*. There are no copies at all in any Chicago library of *Hillandale News*. Chicago has three significant research institutions for music: Newberry Library, Northwestern University, and University of Chicago.

Another means of discovering the value of the collector journals is through the periodical indexing and abstract services. Musicologists regularly use *RILM Abstracts*⁵ and *Music Index*.⁶ *RILM* has a list of so-called core journals that are fully indexed: none of the collector journals (not even the *ARSC Journal*) appears there. Under the topic “Discography” in the 1989 *RILM* (the most recent year of publication) there are 76 entries, drawn from a worldwide miscellany of books and periodicals, none from the collector journals. In *Music Index* there is a list of journals that are regularly examined; it included, in the 1991 annual volume, the *ARSC Journal* and *Record Research*, but no other titles from the discographical field. Considering the slight appearance of scholarly materials about recordings in the main indexing tools for music, it should not be surprising that musicologists and music librarians appear to be uninformed about such publications.

If this situation is to be improved, it seems that much of the burden must fall upon the editors of the collector journals. One step would be to send gratis copies to the libraries of universities where considerable musical research takes place. The librarians would need to agree to accept the journal, so some exploratory correspondence would be needed. Indeed, a certain reluctance on the part of the librarians may be expected, even though the offer is for a gift subscription, since libraries are concerned about the costs of processing periodicals that may not live long, or that may not interest their readers. It is understood that sending gratis issues to libraries will be an economic hardship to the low-budget collector journals, but enhanced exposure – and

more citations – should lead to more subscriptions. For a list of libraries that have music research collections, there is a useful – albeit somewhat dated – directory.⁷ An ideal arrangement would be for the editors to agree among themselves on a select list of a dozen or so libraries in which to set up their files. At the same time, the *Music Index* should be advised of the publication of each journal it does not now cover, and copies should be sent to its editor for indexing.

How seriously the musical scholar or music librarian will take articles in the collector periodicals – once they have better access to them – depends to some extent on the presentation of the periodicals themselves. While the *ARSC Journal* will impress any observer as a publication that is professionally edited and produced, and one whose content is of research quality, other worthy journals may give a less clear picture. For example, the excellence of *Record Research* is partly obscured by its typeface and low-quality graphics. Librarians would be concerned about the lack of exact dating for issues of *Antique Phonograph Monthly* (it is said to have “four issues per volume” but the beginning date for a volume is not given, and indeed there have been 90 issues in 11 volumes so far!).

There is increasing attention among scholars to the desirability of peer review. Journals with a policy of sending submitted articles to one or two expert “referees” for critical comments have a stronger foothold in the mainstream of scholarly publication than the non-refereed journals. It should be understood that in musicology and in other learned disciplines there are non-refereed journals with wide acceptance; however, the trend is surely the other way – toward more peer review. An editor who wants to take on this extra layer of work should announce in each issue of the journal that all articles submitted will be sent out for comments. This notice will perhaps discourage some authors, but indeed if a person is confident in the accuracy and solidity of what is submitted, that should not be the case. In fact the writers in the collector journals often ask for comments and corrections – the trouble is that such comments, if there are any, come in later and are published independently of the original article, often lost to the reader of the original. It seems to me preferable to clear up errors (if any) and fill in gaps before publication, rather than sometime later. In this connection it may be asked why the editor cannot in many cases serve as the referee. The collector journals are all edited by competent scholars, who can after all examine submitted articles from an expert point of view. As an editor myself, I am frequently tempted to take that shortcut; but except in rare cases where the article’s topic coincides exactly with a research specialty of my own – a subfield in which I have kept up with the literature and have a full grasp of the issues, as well as freedom from any possible bias – I have followed the peer review procedure. Usually I find the referees have something useful to say that I had not anticipated. This is a consideration worth pondering, despite the problems that it brings.

The preceding remarks have dealt with expanding access to (and acceptance of) journals and articles in journals. Separately published discographies also present access problems. For example, the notable series of pop/jazz discographies issued by the Joyce Record Club is probably not to be found, in its entirety, in any library. It would be safe to say the same about the Micrography series edited by Dick Bakker. Books, in series or not, that are published at the personal expense of the author-discographers tend to reach very few libraries, since there is usually no listing of such issues in standard databases such as *American Book Publishing Record*, *Cumulative Book Index*, or *Books in Print*. Librarians are traditionally skeptical of self-published books; we refer to them, often unfairly, as “vanity press” publications. (Of course such

books do not pass the test of review by a commercial publisher, who depends, like the journal editor, on peer review of submitted manuscripts.) In general it is best to avoid publication by local printers, and to strive for publication by publishers with distribution structures of which librarians are aware. It is worth the effort to make inquiries of such receptive publishers as Greenwood Press, Scarecrow Press (the two leading producers of discographies), Garland Publishing, McFarland & Co., and Oryx Press, before turning to do-it-yourself production. The loss of immediate revenue in doing that – i.e., the drop in net sales profit to the author – will be, in most cases, made up by the greater sales that can be achieved by a national publisher. Certainly the route to publication through an established publisher is also much slower than self-publishing. But in the scholarly fields, like musicology, self-publishing is virtually unknown. Now all this discussion must lead us to another troublesome topic.

My next concern is format and stylistic presentation of discographical articles, monographs, and reviews. The output of sound recordings scholars has a better chance of being accepted in the mainstream of scholarly writing (by publishers, libraries, and researchers) if it is consistent in the way material is presented, and if full information is given. Let us consider the case of a discographical article submitted to a collector journal. Most such articles seem to have direct, sober titles that give a clear indication of their contents. But others have titles that convey little or nothing of the article's content, e.g., "A Hot Performer" [about the hot air motor of 1910]; "Revolving Thoughts," "An Era's End," or "Put on Your Happy Feet." Some articles demean the research behind them with humorous titles, like "Gull(s) of My Dreams." The point is that both content and seriousness ought to be clear in a title that may appear in a bibliography or index, or may otherwise come to the attention of a scholar.

Indeed the author's name should be clear as well. An author should, in my opinion, decide on a form of name and use it consistently in all publications – and that form should eschew nicknames.

Anyone who encounters an article should be informed at once if it is part of a series on the same topic; and if it is, what number the present article has in the series, and where/when the earlier numbers appeared in print. In this context I might add that the practice of extending discographical research on a label or artist across the decades presents a trial to the user, and to the indexer. Such events do not appear in scholarly journals of other fields, certainly not of musicology. In compiling the Bibliography for my *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound in the United States* I spent many tedious hours piecing together the publication facts for series discographies such as those by Bill Bennett and George Blacker in *Record Research* or those of Clifford Williams [and associates] in *The Record Collector*. My recommendation is for the author to complete the research and then publish it all at once. It will then have a wider audience, and will suffer less from incomplete treatment. (Numerous examples of incomplete treatment are found in bibliographies, where a few parts of a series, or only one part, may stand in place of the entire series.)

The documentation in discographical articles is very often missing key parts. Footnote citations and bibliography entries ought to conform to a standard style, such as the one used in the *ARSC Journal*, and give complete bibliographic information. It is frustrating for a reader, in particular one who is not closely familiar with writings in discography, to encounter untraceable citations – those that cannot be located in library or database catalogs, and are thus useless.

Actually the collector magazines are not heavy with footnotes and bibliographies. It will seem curious to the musicologist, or other non-discographical reader, to see very

little reference to earlier work on the topic of the article. A case in point is "Beecham's Half Century: A Survey of His CD Reissues," by Harry Butler, the *ARSC Journal* 1993;24(1):49-57. This interesting commentary is without footnote references, although numerous direct quotations from Sir Thomas Beecham and others are presented. Most striking is the lack of a citation to the earlier discographic work on Beecham, in particular Michael H. Gray's book,⁸ and Lyndon Jenkins' *Gramophone* article that covers much of Butler's ground and gives a more informative CD list for Beecham.⁹ The reader of Butler will be likely to think either that there was nothing published earlier about Beecham's recordings, or that Butler is unaware of such publications – both incorrect assumptions of course.

An example from *Hillandale News*¹⁰ shows the casual kind of referencing that is typical in the collector journals. An article by George Taylor about Léon Scott cites three books in this manner:

Most of this information came from the book *La Machine Parlante*, by Paul Charbon (1981). Other sources include Read and Welch's *From Tinfol to Stereo* (1959) and John Cain's *Talking Machines* (1961)... (p. 319)

That one title is not italicized while two others are will alert the reader to the unclear standards that are operating, or to careless editing. The lack of direct page references is worth noting; such a practice does not appear in the mainstream scholarly journals. (Indeed it would be difficult to find exact page citations in Read and Welch, who say almost nothing about Scott and his phonograph.) First names are missing for Read and Welch, and places/publishers are lacking for all the books. An uncited book that probably should have been referenced is Daniel Marty's history,¹¹ since it carries an account of Scott's work that varies (in the role of Rudolph Koenig) from that of Taylor. The reader would be interested in Taylor's review of the evidence. None of the sources are primary; can Charbon or Cain be relied on? Such a discussion would have transformed an interesting essay into a piece of scholarship.

Apart from those in footnotes and bibliographies, other names and titles may appear in the text portion of the article. These are often names of other writers or of recording artists, or titles of books or recordings; at times a library or archive may be mentioned. For the best effect, all such citations should be complete enough for the reader to follow through with finding out more about them if necessary. It is a good rule to use full names for the first mention of any individual, even a familiar one.

If book-length discographical studies are going to enter the mainstream of learned monographs, they ought to have, first of all, the characteristics already suggested for journal articles. In addition, a book must be fully indexed, by name and subject. The index should follow the format found in publications of major publishers, and should avoid idiosyncratic plans. It seems to me that the lack of indexing in several monumental books in the field of recorded sound is a serious obstacle to further inquiry in the topics they cover. As examples I offer two outstanding titles by Allen Koenigsberg,¹² and one by George L. Frow.¹³ These classic studies are packed with data that are lost to the reader because the books are unindexed.

A few other formats require attention: book reviews, record reviews, and bibliographies. A list of desiderata for each format may suffice:

A book review should have:

- the complete title, author(s), edition number, place of publication, publisher, date, pagination, ISBN, and price of the book being reviewed

- in the case of a new edition, a comparison by the reviewer between the previous and present editions
 - a description of the content, based on the concept that the reader of the review does not know anything about the book
 - a comparison with other books on the subject
 - a note on the qualifications of the author, including mention of the author's earlier works of importance
 - comments on special features in the book (or lack of them): index, bibliography, appendices, graphics
 - major defects and how they could be improved in later editions
 - notice of factual errors, as a guide to the user of the book
 - a clear overall assessment of the book's value and place in the literature of the field
 - if the book is a discography, or has a discography in it, an evaluation of the technical aspects of that presentation, in accord with generally accepted standards.¹⁴

These observations on book reviews are worth consideration, I believe, by reviewers and journal editors; practice in this respect in the collector journals has been widely variable and generally unsatisfactory. Reviews are frequently no more than casual comments, and almost invariably they fail to present important facts about the book being reviewed, such as publication date or place.

A record review should have:

- the complete publication data, including issue date, with prices for the various versions (tape, videodisk, etc.)
 - full data on the original issue, if the item reviewed is a reissue
 - full names of the principal artists
 - description of any accompanying documentation, including full name of the author
 - technical information about the recording, as appropriate
 - comparisons, as appropriate to the record in hand, with others of similar content
 - a clear overall assessment of the recording's value and place in the total recorded output of past and present as related to the composition or content it presents.

A bibliography should have:

- specific criteria that explain why certain items are included and others are not
- a reader-centered arrangement, with multiple access points through indexing and cross references
 - in a book's bibliography, a single list of titles at the end, rather than separate lists by chapter
 - identification of all authors by full name for each item
 - complete publication information (title and subtitle, edition number, date of the first edition if the item is a revised edition, place of publication, publisher, date, pagination, ISBN) – all presented in consistent style
 - Library of Congress call number (as an extra benefit, and encouragement, to the person who wants to find the item in a library)
 - enough information about obscure items for the reader to locate them in libraries, or perhaps for purchase
 - identification of reprints of the work, if any.

As a final offering of advice, I will address publishers of monographs and/or journals. In order to ensure that the authors' efforts reach the scholar outside the collector

community, editors should consider tier-pricing plans so that wealthier purchasers subsidize the less wealthy. For example, a lower subscription price for a journal sent to a Third World country will encourage distribution in such countries. A higher price for libraries than for individual subscribers will tend to increase the number of individuals without losing the libraries on the subscription list. While librarians are concerned about the high cost of periodical subscriptions, I do not believe that any subscriptions are declined, or dropped, because of a \$5-\$10 price rise. There is also a useful sacrifice publishers can make, which is to place gratis copies of monographs in selected libraries (in the manner of gratis journal subscriptions, suggested above). The point is that wide exposure of the publication to the scholarly community will result in better sales as well as enhanced communication between discographers and other researchers. Books, as well as journals, need to be sent to suitable index/abstract services (noted above). They should also be sent to the editors of periodicals in which reviews of such material appear, and to editors of guides to reference books.

While these suggestions have been made with the prime intention of spreading the discographical word beyond the collector community, it may be that in following them the writers and producers of collector materials will also increase the utility of their work among themselves. Those of us who read the collector journals faithfully would also enjoy more clarity and consistency of presentation along the lines I have discussed. Everyone can use a little more system and order, I suppose, though we may run the risk of wanting too much. How to balance the urges of the right brain and the left brain is an elegant problem for all of us, discographers included.

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Endnotes:

1. It was interesting to read, after the text of this article had been completed, a related observation: "Discography – especially on the scale of the monograph – is, like any bibliographic discipline, a collective enterprise that requires many hands to achieve a successful result. I would also ask for more help from librarians, indexers, catalogers and bibliographers so that discographic materials might receive the same treatment as printed ones" (Gray MH. "Discography: Discipline and Musical Ally," *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 1992;2[3/4]:325).
2. *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Sadie S., ed. London: Macmillan, 1980.
3. *The Oxford Companion to Musical Instruments*, Baines A., ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
4. *Companion to Baroque Music*, Sadie JA., ed. New York: Schirmer, 1991.
5. *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature*, 1967;1(1). New York: RILM Center, 1967-. Quarterly; annual cumulative indexes.
6. *Music Index*, 1949-. Detroit: Information Service, 1950-. Monthly; annual cumulations.
7. *Directory of Music Research Libraries*, Benton R., ed. Vol. 1, Canada; Vol. 2, United States. Kassel, Germany: Barenreiter, 1983.
8. Gray MH. *Beecham: A Centenary Discography*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979.
9. Jenkins L. "Sir Thomas Beecham," *Gramophone* 1990; July: 193+.

10. Taylor G. "Léon Scott, The Father of Sound Recording," *Hilldale News* 1993;194:315-319.
11. Marty D. *Illustrated History of Talking Machines* (New York: Dorset Press, 1979: 11-12; originally in French: *Histoire illustrée du phonographe* (Lausanne: Edita-Vilo, 1979).
12. Koenigsberg A. *Edison Cylinder Records, 1889-1912, with an Illustrated History of the Phonograph*. Second Edition. Brooklyn: APM Press, 1987; Koenigsberg A. *The Patent History of the Phonograph, 1877-1912*. Brooklyn: APM Press, 1990.
13. Frow GL, Sefl AF. *The Edison Cylinder Phonographs 1877-1929*. Sevenoaks, Kent, England: George L. Frow, 1978.
14. Smolian S. "Standards for the Review of Discographic Works," *ARSC Journal* 1976;7(3):47-55.