

artists, on four principal record labels, during the “golden age” of acoustic recording. Do not look here for all the paraphernalia of modern discographies: there are no recording dates, matrix numbers, unissued takes or details on accompaniment. Instead we have a single alphabetical listing of artists, from Bessie Abott to Efrem Zimbalist, each followed by a short introductory paragraph and a list of titles and issue numbers. The general period in which each group of records was issued is indicated, but not the specific year. The labels covered are Victor, Columbia, Vocalion and Brunswick. Following the status-conscious conventions of the classical field, only these labels’ “celebrity” series are listed, i.e., Victor Red Seal and its equivalents (the author spends a good deal of time grousing about the fact that Columbia had no separate celebrity series for most of the period covered, complicating his task). Issue numbers are provided for original releases and some 78 r.p.m. reissues (e.g., single-face and double-face), but not for other 78s or any LP or CD versions.

With all of the exclusions, the listings for any given artist are likely to represent only a portion of his or her recorded repertoire. Rachmaninoff’s Victor Red Seals are here, but not his Edisons. Likewise the prolific De Gogorza is represented by his many Red Seals, but everything prior to 1904 is omitted. He is better off than Ferruccio Giannini, the first classical vocal artist to record commercially, who receives only a short descriptive paragraph and no listings at all (he recorded before the Red Seal series began). The same is true for Roland Hayes, whose 1917-1918 privately marketed discs and 1923 English Vocalions don’t count in this book (although I am not sure why the 1924 US Vocalion reissues of the latter aren’t listed; wrong series, maybe?). Tantalizingly, the notes for many artists cite examples of their non-listed repertoire – but only examples. In sum, there is a lot here, and a lot that’s not.

Owners of the previous edition may be interested in learning what revisions have been made. The introduction, with its label discussions, has been substantially rewritten, and two new appendixes have been added: Mr. Moses’ fifty favorite recordings, and capsule reviews of Metropolitan Opera performances he attended during his brief career as a critic from 1929-1933. The main body of listings appears to be substantially a reprint of the 1949 edition, with occasional changes to the notes. The only entirely new listing seems to be for John Charles Thomas, who was dismissed with a paragraph in 1949 but now gets a page worth of issues on Vocalion and Brunswick. With the new appendixes, the page count has increased from 199 pages in 1949 to 208 in this edition.

Also carried over from the 1949 edition are indexes to Victor Red Seal issue numbers, operas, and the limited number of instrumentalists and orchestras found in the listings.

Production quality is good, with a handsome multi-colored cover displaying a selection of labels. And of course the price is right.

All in all, and taken for what it is, this new edition should prove as useful a checklist for collectors as have its honored predecessors. *Reviewed by Tim Brooks*

The Banjo on Record: A Bio-Discography.

Edited by Uli Heier and Rainer E. Lotz. Greenwood Press, 1993. 664 pages, \$75.00. ISBN 0-313-28492-X.

Rainer Lotz, one of the world’s foremost discographers of early recording history, has co-authored this new volume that will be of considerable value to researchers. Of more

value, perhaps, than the title implies. Dr. Lotz has an unfortunate habit of titling his books in a manner that understates their true breadth of coverage. An earlier work, the valuable *German Ragtime & Prehistory of Jazz* (Storyville, 1985), was criticized by a reviewer in the *ARSC Journal* (1987;19[2-3]:105-107) for wandering far afield from the narrow subject of ragtime. Similarly, if you assume that the present volume is a listing of instrumental banjo records, prepare to be surprised. There is everything here from vocal "coon duets" by Collins and Harlan with banjo accompaniment to Nat Shilkret's big 1920s dance orchestra pumping out "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," while banjo master Harry Reser plunks along enthusiastically in the background.

Banjo on Record begins with a brief foreword by noted discographer Brian Rust, on whose unpublished 1966 manuscript the present work is based, followed by a preface and acknowledgements; a most informative essay about "The Banjo in Phonograph Recording History" by Lowell Schreyer; a colorful article on the social history and technical development of the banjo by Robert Lloyd Webb; descriptions of the major types of banjo; 46 pages of black & white photographs of banjo record labels (why not photos of the artists?); the main, 530-page discography, arranged alphabetically by artist; a bibliography; and a helpful 31-page index of song titles. Despite the book's title, little biographical information is included.

The criteria for inclusion are broad: "all the records issued on cylinders or 78 rpm discs on which the banjo... plays a solo role or a dominant part" (p.xi). The obvious suspects are all here, including Harry Reser (77 pages of listings!), Vess L. Ossman (26 pages), Fred Van Eps (20 pages), Olly Oakley, Eddie Peabody, and Ruby Brooks. Van Eps, incidentally, must be one of the all time champs in terms of recording longevity. His first issue was an 1898 brown wax cylinder, and his last a 1956 LP. There are also hundreds of lesser known artists, some from such unlikely places as Kenya and Calcutta (the scope is international), as well as dance bands and others who for whatever reason used a banjo in one of their sessions. Among those included are Louis Armstrong, Ethel Waters and James Europe's Society Orchestra!

All fields of music are fully covered, except for one. In their foreword, the authors regret the lack of cooperation they received from country music researchers (one wonders who they approached?), and the consequent lack of listings in that field. There are no listings for Earl Scruggs, although Uncle Dave Macon gets four-and-a-half pages.

The banjo was of course one of the most frequently recorded instruments during the phonograph's earliest years, and one of *Banjo on Records's* great contributions is its inclusion of some very early artists who have been ill-documented elsewhere. One of these, Louis Vasnier of the regional Louisiana Phonograph Company (c.1891), is of special interest as he was one of the very first black artists to record commercially.

Due to the poor documentation of the early days the entries on many pioneer artists are far from complete, as the authors freely admit. At least we have a start. Unfortunately the authors sometimes present questionable assumptions as fact, so one must be careful even with some of the listings that are given. For example Vess L. Ossman is credited with the banjo accompaniment on several early Columbia discs by baritone Carroll Clark, when there is no evidence of which I am aware as to who plays the banjo on these sides.

Recording dates are also sometimes unnecessarily shaky. Cylinders by the Bohee Brothers, James and George, are dated as "ca. early 1890" allowing the claim to be made that they were "probably the first black artists to have recorded commercially." The reader should be told that this date – and therefore the claim – is based on very

shaky evidence and some large leaps of assumption, as detailed in an article by Dr. Lotz published in *78 Quarterly*, Vol. 1 No. 7.

Perhaps the most amusing gaffe occurs on page 201, when the authors solemnly inform us that several 1906 titles recorded by the American Record Company were issued on "Indian Records," so named "because of the Red Indian on the label." Nonsense! (The label is in fact "American.") Do we list Victor Talking Machine Company products as "Dog Records"?

Despite the occasional errors and omissions, Heier and Lotz have made an admirable start at documenting an important genre of early recording. Moreover they have cast their net widely enough to make this book useful to early recording researchers in general, not just to banjo enthusiasts. *Banjo on Record* will be valuable to anyone concerned with recordings which in any way involve the banjo. *Reviewed by Tim Brooks*