

Current Bibliography

“Current Bibliography” is an annotated index of research on recording history that has appeared recently in small circulation journals. To be indexed here an article must be in English, be reasonably substantive, and deal with recording history — as opposed to musicology, sociology, or contemporary subjects such as record reviews. “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 March and September, 1994. If you contact one of these publications or authors, please mention ARSC and “Current Bibliography.”

Notes

We welcome two publications to our little honor roll this issue. West Coast collector and English teacher Tim Gracyk is the publisher of the latest collector’s periodical, the oddly named *Victrola and 78 Journal*. Each issue contains several short, informed articles about early twentieth century recordings (mostly popular). A running feature is “My Ten Most Played 78 Records,” consisting of top ten lists submitted by various collectors with their reasons for choosing each. There are some interesting choices. The other publication joining us is *The Mississippi Rag*, which has been around for 20 years but which we have just caught up with. It is a monthly on newsprint, focussing on traditional jazz performers.

Those interested in discographies of 78 rpm era English labels will want to obtain Arthur Badrock’s handy bibliography of same, appearing in *The Historic Record*, No. 31. Badrock lists discographies appearing in books, pamphlets and articles, several by himself. On the American front, ARSC member Kurt Nauck has undertaken the daunting task of compiling a catalog of “every 78 rpm and cylinder recording made in the United States!” (sic — the exclamation point is his). This is basically a compilation of individual label lists and discographies compiled by many others, and nearly half a million computerized entries are said to be in hand already. The entire database is to be published on CD ROM, those little silver computer discs that can hold enormous amounts of information. A laudable project, and we wish him well.

Kurt may also need your support on another front. As Chairman of the ARSC Dealer’s Committee, he has undertaken a project to develop a standardized approach to record grading, described elsewhere in this issue. The mere thought of such a bold

venture by ARSC drew a front page editorial attack from Gene Joslin, editor of the widely-read *Joslin's Jazz Journal* (May, 1994), who screamed, "WHO ASKED THEM!...WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN?... You have to wonder about the self-anointed presumption of whoever decided the ARSC should undertake this crusade." Joslin allowed Kurt a lengthy rebuttal in the August, 1994 issue. Perhaps more significantly the August letters column was filled with reaction from Joslin's readers, nearly all of it supporting the ARSC initiative. Stay tuned, sparks are flyin'!

Researchers may be interested in articles which have recently appeared on two important public archives. Member Elwood McKee has provided an overview and access guide to the Library of Congress collections in *The Record Collector*, Vol. 39 No. 2; and the surprisingly extensive Goodspeed Opera House Library and Archives is profiled in *Show Music*, Winter 1992/93 (Vol. 8 No. 4).

Lies That Will Not Die #5: "A Dangerous Book"

More than four years ago I reviewed at length a book called *Pop Memories*, by Joel Whitburn (*ARSC Journal* 1990;21[1]:134-141). It was alleged to be a compilation and index of best selling record charts from 1890 to 1954, complete with highest chart position reached, weeks on the charts, best sellers by decade, lists of "#1 Hits," etc. In fact there were no real national charts until 1940, and the author had made up the earlier rankings based on a clumsy misreading of scattered original and secondary sources. Basically, records that are interesting and collectible today were given high "chart positions," uninteresting records were shunted aside (though they may have been huge sellers), and hits were shuffled on-and-off the "charts" in rock-era fashion, showing none of the longer-term popularity which individual records actually had in the early 1900s. In addition, all the old lies about million sellers (7 million copies supposedly sold of Vernon Dalhart's "The Prisoner's Song," 5 million of Gene Austin's "My Blue Heaven," a million of Bessie Smith's "Down Hearted Blues," etc.) were dutifully enshrined. In all, it was a dreadful misrepresentation of record sales in the early 1900s.

I called it "a dangerous book" because it looked so technically precise, with all those numbers, and because Whitburn has a well-earned reputation for accuracy for his fine indexes of real, post-1940 charts. That has been the case. Within the last few years, RCA has released a multi-CD set called "Nipper's Greatest Hits" (1901-on), prominently featuring Whitburn's "chart positions"; Rhino has a new series of "Pop Memories" CD's featuring them; even the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, in its fancy 1991 Grammys book (Stephen Holden, "All Roads Still Lead to New York," *The 33rd Grammy Annual Awards* published by NARAS, 1991), ran a historical article on recording in New York that repeated many of the same canards.

A Texas collector who is writing the definitive biography of Billy Murray plans to use *Pop Memories* extensively, I am told. He is not alone. The author proudly claims in his sales brochure that *Pop Memories* "is by far one of our all-time best sellers — a proven favorite with our readers!"

A cynic once said that history is nothing but "lies agreed upon." I have never believed that, but sometimes you wonder if Gresham had a point.

Oh Yeah, Mr. Smarty Pants?

Not that we're immune to mistakes. Member Allen Koenigsberg points out a recurrent

error right here in “Current Bibliography,” involving citations for the discovery of the world’s oldest playable recording, which was made around 1880 (*ARSC Journal* 1992;23[2]:252-276). A number of writers, myself included, have sometimes referred to the maker as inventor Thomas Lambert. Allen points out that Thomas Lambert made the celluloid Lambert cylinders of the early 1900s; the 1880 inventor was named *Frank* Lambert. Oops!

The “CB” Awards

In this age of awards, we end with well-deserved recognition for a few publications which have gone beyond mere paper and ink to achieve something truly special for their readers. Or their attempted readers. Please give a big hand for the...

“Most Ruthless Binding Award” — to *The Absolute Sound*, a fine, slick review journal which almost dares you to find out what’s inside; it is bound so tightly that if you try to lay it open, it snaps shut like a bear trap on your fingers!

“Fastest Text Tango Award” — previously presented to *Goldmine*, whose long, rambling articles bob and weave through the 200-page issues, hop-skipping over advertising sections so confusingly that you wonder where they’re going next. If they happen to leave out a “go to page___” at the bottom of a page, you’re lost! But you will surely see every one of those many ads the article wraps itself around, which is perhaps the point.

“Slowest Text Tango: Will I Live to See This Finished Award” — without doubt to *Record Research*, whose listing of the huge Plaza Matrix Series began in July 1961 and continues today, in tiny installments, even though the original author died years ago and the magazine itself seems to be on life-support (the last issue came out a year and a half ago). May Editor Len Kunstadt live to be 100! Make that 120.

“Most Pretentious Title Award” — to *Popular Music and Society*, home of such treatises as “The Perils of Commodity Fetishism: Tin Pan Alley’s Portrait of the Romantic Marketplace, 1920-1942” and “Sun, Sea, Sex and Senoritas: ‘Shorthand’ Images of Ethnicity, Ethos and Gender in Country Songs Set in the Circum-Caribbean.” Of course, *PM&S* was also the home of one of the best, or at least funniest, academic articles ever written on rock ‘n’ roll (in my humble opinion). “‘Wo-Uh-Ho Peggy Sue’: Exploring a Teenage Queen Linguistically” in Vol. 2 No. 3 (Spring 1973) was a dead-on analysis by a professional linguist of the true secret of Buddy Holly’s success: the *aspirated glottal stop*. It is, he explained, a sort of “glorified hiccup... but even if it’s a belch, it’s a very sincere belch.”

“Most ‘Down-Home’ Award” goes to *In The Groove*, the newsletter of the Michigan Antique Phonograph Society, full of newsy chatter and some of the friendliest collectors you could ever hope to meet. Reports of society meetings can actually make your mouth water (“As in previous picnic meetings at the Gearhart’s, the assortment of fried chicken, salads, side dishes and desserts was plentiful and delicious. Cold drinks covered in ice really hit the spot on a warm and humid summer evening. The milk shakes made on vintage mixers were delightful...” STOP! I’M SALIVATING!!).

And finally, the “That’s Incredible! Award” goes to Allen Koenigsberg’s *Antique Phonograph Monthly*, which is probably packed with more startling discoveries and research breakthroughs per square inch than any journal published. Who can resist articles like “Balloon Fell on Him” (11:2), “Elam Gilbert, An Insane Person: The Mystery of an Unknown Phonograph Inventor” (8:9), “A Brief History of Cylinder Record Cores” (7:1), “His Master’s Casket” (revealing — maybe — that Nipper was

actually sitting on a casket)(6:7), “The Phonograph and the Statue of Liberty” (revealing an 1878 proposal to place a gigantic phonograph in the base of the statue, with which to blare out weather warnings to the entire city)(8:2), or the all-time classic “Gramophone-Foot,” about a phonograph that was built into the preserved foot of a huge killer elephant (7:1)?

None of this is meant to belittle any of these fine publications. They have all contributed mightily to collecting and research. Just beware that a balloon might fall on you while you’re skipping pages through a never-ending article, the subject of which you can’t even understand, by an insane inventor, on the way to one of Mrs. Gearhart’s delicious milk shakes. Unless the issue snaps shut on your fingers first.

Acknowledgements

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

Black Music Research Journal, Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College, 600 So. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605

Bluegrass Unlimited, Box 111, Broad Run, VA 22014

DISCoveries, P.O. Box 1050, Dubuque, IA 52004-1050

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

Ephemera Journal, Ephemera Society of America, P.O. Box 37, Schoharie, NY 12157

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

Gunn Report, Bramble Hall Lane, Daws Heath, Hadleigh, Essex SS7 2XG England

Hillandale News, c/o Chris Hamilton, Hon. Treasurer, City of London Phonograph & Gramophone Society, Ardlarich, 2 Kirklands Park, Cupar, Fife KY15 4EP England

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

IAJRC Journal, International Assoc. of Jazz Record Collectors, 127 Briarcliff Lane, Bel Air, MD 21014

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

International Talking Machine Review, 105 Sturdee Ave., Gillingham, Kent ME7 2HG, England

Jerry's Rhythm Rag, Carl A. Hallstrom, Liljefors gata 85, S-754 29 Uppsala, Sweden

Joslin's Jazz Journal, Box 213, Parsons, KS 67357

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

Mississippi Rag, P.O. Box 19068, Minneapolis, MN 55419

The Music Box, 3606 Edwin Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45204

New Amberola Graphic, 37 Caledonia St., St. Johnsbury, VT 05819

New Orleans Music, 127 Mount Drive, Urmston, Manchester M31 1QA, England

Old Time Music, 22 Cranbourne Road, London N10 2BT, England

Popular Music & Society, Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green, OH 43403

Recollections, 2743 Eighth St., Berkeley, CA 94710

Record Collector, The c/o Larry Lustig, 111 Longshots Close, Broomfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 5DU, England

Record Finder, Box 1047, Glen Allen, VA 23060

Show Music, 5800 Pebble Beach Blvd., Las Vegas, NV 89108

Sound Box, The, Calif. Antique Phono. Society, Box 67, Duarte, CA 91010

Soundtrack!, Luc Van De Ven, Astridlaan 171, 2800 Mechelen, Belgium

Storyville, 66 Fairview Drive, Chigwell, Essex, IG7 6HS, England

Tailgate Ramblings, Chas. V. Ritterli, 10005 Evergreen Ave., Columbia, MD 21046

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