

# THE RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN ARCHIVES OF RECORDED SOUND

by

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The Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound functions as the New York Public Library's research facility in the area of sound recordings--both in terms of the recordings themselves and in terms of print materials relating primarily to the program content of sound recordings and their historical development through the medium of the international recording industry from its beginnings to the present day. Materials pertaining primarily to the economics of the industry or to its technological aspects are to be found in other areas of the New York Public Library research facilities--specifically, the Economics and Public Affairs Division, and the Science and Technology Research Center.

The Archives are located in the Performing Arts Research Center on the third floor of the building housing the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts, which itself comprises the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. The performing arts divisions for both the research libraries and the branch libraries systems are under the same roof, encompassing the areas of dance, music, and theatre--with sound recordings functioning as a service medium for all other library divisions.

Like the Library of Congress, whose Recorded Sound Section is an adjunct of its Music Division, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound operates as a unit of the Music Division of the New York Public Library. However, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives by no means restricts its holdings to music, but includes very substantial holdings of nonmusical materials--especially in the field of drama and literary readings, as well as in political and special events documentation. As might be expected of a repository functioning as part of a Performing Arts Research

Center, the acquisition policy and the resulting holdings of the Archives are oriented to the performing arts, with strong, but by no means exclusive, emphasis on commercially processed discs.

Since opening for public service in late November, 1965, following more than two years of intensive preparatory work, the recorded sound holdings at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives have tripled in quantity from 100,000 to more than 300,000 items, these being supplemented by some 800 shelf-feet of books, monographs, catalogs, periodicals, clippings, and related items bearing on sound recordings and the recording industry.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, in common with the other New York Public Library research libraries functions as a limited access facility, being designed primarily to serve the needs of the individual scholar or professional working at an advanced level.

#### A bit of past history

What eventually was to become the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound had its first significant beginnings in the New York Public Library Music Division in the middle 1930's under the direction of the chief, Carleton Sprague Smith, with the greater part of the development work being entrusted to Philip L. Miller, who in 1959 succeeded Dr. Smith as chief of the Music Division.

During this pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein period, print materials were handled as part of the regular acquisitions of the Music Division, while sound recordings--whether received as corporate donations, beginning in 1935 with an initial gift from Columbia Records, or as gifts from private collectors--were stored partly in the basement of the Central Building of the New York Public Library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, and partly in the 43rd Street Annex. While no facilities were available for audition on a regular public service basis, periodic samplings from the library's collection could be heard by way of recorded music lecture-concerts in the Central Building during

the winter months, and in the summer by way of similar weekly noon-hour concerts piped through loudspeakers in Bryant Park immediately in back of the Central Building.

From the 1940's on, sporadic efforts were made to establish a public card catalog for the library's sound recordings collection, the major print materials meanwhile being cataloged as part of the regular Music Division holdings and being made available to users on the same basis as other research libraries' print materials.

Although the sound recordings repository was to remain quiescent for nearly twenty years, this long period of semi-silence was not due to any lack of effort on the part of Dr. Smith, Mr. Miller, or the library administration to acquire the funding necessary for establishment of proper archival service facilities. Indeed, funding problems aside, the architectural and space limitations of the Central Building itself precluded to a large extent any substantial progress in this direction. Among the various efforts that were made during this pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein era was one in 1947 calling for the establishment of the sound recordings archive together with the Music Division in the former Carnegie mansion at 91st and Fifth Avenue, to be done in collaboration with the Musical Instrument Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was then that this writer first became involved with sound archival work, having been invited to prepare a preliminary prospectus for the proposed archive. It was to be another twenty years before the opportunity arose to pick up where this brief personal participation had left off.

Meanwhile conditions for a major breakthrough came about in 1962 when the New York Public Library accepted the invitation to have its performing arts divisions become a constituent part of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts; for with the prospect of a new and specially planned building, the feasibility factor for a sound recordings archive with full public service facilities became enhanced to the point of genuine possibility. Enter Mr. Richard Rodgers, who--after being shown by his friend, Gilbert Chapman, New York Public Library board chairman, the stacks of records mouldering in the Central Building basement--determined to put the resources of the Rodgers and Hammerstein

Foundation to work on behalf of the sound recordings archive that now bears the Rodgers and Hammerstein name.

With Jean Bowen as its first head, the "Rodgers and Hammerstein Project," as it was then called, was faced not only with the task of getting the sound recordings repository into shape for future public service, including full cataloging of that sector which would yield the greatest degree of accessibility for the least expenditure of cataloging man-hours (namely the long-playing discs); but also with extracting from the Music Division holdings those print materials most essential for the services of the sound archives. Then there was the matter of setting up and working the "bugs" out of the elaborate disc and tape playback equipment--equipment that would not only provide audition services for the greater part of the sound recordings collection, but also offer a minimum basic facility for transferring to tape for preservation purposes the most rare and delicate holdings of the sound recordings repository; for by this time, the collection was in possession of a substantial quantity of major rarities including pressings on the Berliner, Gramophone & Typewriter, Zonophone, Fonotipia, and Columbia Grand Opera labels; a significant number of unique aluminum and acetate discs embodying major documentation of concert performances and ethnographic field recording; and most importantly the wax cylinders embodying the 1902-3 Metropolitan Opera performances recorded by Lionel Mapleson with some of the greatest voices of that particular "Golden Age" and including the only available authenticated documentation of the legendary Jean de Rezske. Thanks to the cooperation of the Library of Congress Sound Recordings Section, eleven of these 118 cylinders were successfully transferred to acetate discs during early 1941 and may be currently heard in their best estate at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound on tapes processed from those acetates.

The grant from the Rodgers and Hammerstein Foundation proved sufficient to accomplish the transition from the "Rodgers and Hammerstein Project" to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, which came into being as a full-scale research facility on November 30, 1965.

## Development and operations--the first decade.

The growth and development of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound--its sound recordings repository, its service and sound recordings preservation facilities, its capacity for information storage, retrieval, and coordination--has been the work of many hands, ranging from those that have grubbed in dank cellars and hot attics in search of special treasures, through those foundations and corporations which have provided major funding and gifts-in-kind, to the literally hundreds of private collectors who have seen fit to make available to the community of scholars and professionals by way of the Archives the fruits of their lifetimes of painstaking collecting--not only of sound recordings, but often of print and pictorial information of unique value to the Archives' work in piecing together the vast mosaic comprising the substance and history of sound recording from its earliest beginnings.

It would take far more space than is available here to enumerate those who have been benefactors to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound both directly and through the use of their good offices; but along with Richard Rodgers, the names of G. Lauder Greenway, Francis Goelet, and the Avalon Foundation stand out as the ones whose generosity, along with that of a half-dozen major record manufacturers, has established the basic foundation for the growth of the Archives' collections, preservation facilities, and public services. Needless to say, even all this largesse from private individuals, foundations, and corporations would have come to naught without the steadfast backing and continued encouragement of the New York Public Library administration from the president's office on down.

From the standpoint of acquisition the development of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound during its first half-dozen years of full operation was concentrated on the expansion of its holdings in those areas indicating both the greatest potential for special strength and the greatest need on the part of users, especially those in the New York metropolitan region--these areas being art-music, American musical

comedy, drama, spoken word materials of both literary and political-documentary import, jazz, and popular entertainment personalities.

In terms of audio facilities and services special efforts here were concentrated on developing a laboratory capable of producing high-quality preservation tapes, accurately pitched, from all manner of original disc and magnetic phonorecord sources. This was made possible by way of a major grant from the Avalon Foundation; further development of the laboratory, to encompass cylinder work and ultra-sonic disc cleaning, is still underway. Meanwhile, the high quality of work and expertise offered by supervising audio technician, Sam Sanders, is attested to by the fact that both Columbia and RCA have turned to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives laboratory for tapes of their own historical recordings, subsequently issued as parts of major packages in long-play format.

For reasons of copyright and proprietary right restrictions, as well as of staff limitations, tape duplication at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound is confined almost entirely to preservation work for on-premises use and to that for proprietary owners of original materials, such as the above-noted commercial record producers. Until such time as changes in the copyright law allow at the very least a measure of free exchange between institutional sound recordings archives as part of "fair use," it is unlikely that the duplication restrictions at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives will be eased.

Meanwhile, the services of the Archives are available on a wide variety of levels both to users from all over the country--and for that matter, the world--and to those requesting information by mail and telephone, inquiries covering everything from available recordings of the motets of Lionel Power to ownership in the rights of the earliest Sun recordings of Elvis Presley.

Present audition facilities at the Archives comprise ten earphone-equipped listening stations--four of which can accommodate two listeners at a time--plus a loud-speaker-equipped room for group listening. Playback to these stations is accommodated by way of six disc

turntables that between them can handle both fine-groove and coarse-groove lateral-cut discs at 33.3-, 45-, 16-, and 78 rpm speeds, as well as by three tape machines capable of handling 1/4-inch tape at the standard speeds and configurations current at this time of writing.

For reasons both of servicing convenience and reasonable preservation stability, it has become a matter of general policy at the Archives to work toward audition servicing only from standard lateral disc formats and from a basic tape-format standard of 7.5 ips full-track (mono or stereo) for most program materials, with an occasional concession in the direction of half-track 7.5 ips for extended documentary spoken materials, such as the complete recorded speeches of Winston Churchill.

Highly perishable original recordings, whether from wax, acetate disc, extremely rare shellac pressings, cassettes, or ultra thin tape, are never serviced for audition in their original form, but must first be transferred to the standard tape format already noted. The same applies at the time of this writing to all vertical-cut recordings.

A special feature of the playback facilities at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives is the installation at each listening station that allows the listener control over program material being auditioned from tape. Where disc playback is handled as a "closed circuit disc jockey" operation, with requests being phoned from the listening area to the audio room where a trained staff operates the turntables, the tape listener has the option of starting, stopping, reversing, or skipping forward once the tape is mounted on the machine. This is of enormous help to certain users such as actors working with tapes of dialects and regional accents that must be repeated an infinite number of times. Indeed, any item in the collection that is in demand for repeated use eventually is transferred to tape and is thereafter serviced only from tape. Likewise, an occasional special request for a programmed sequence, involving for example 25 different performances of the Chopin Minute Waltz, will be taped ahead of time. Yet another long-term application of this principle involves recordings of major entertainment personalities who

have recorded prolifically over many years, such as Bert Williams. Here the Archives hope eventually to assemble a substantial collection of taped "packages" encompassing all its holdings in 78 rpm format of such figures as Bert Williams, Nat Wills, the Avon Comedy Four, Nora Bayes, and the like, thus cutting to a minimum the handling of irreplaceable original discs and enhancing efficiency of service. Here it should be stated that for all the emphasis placed on the service facilities at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives, its first obligation--in common with all major research archives--is the preservation of its holdings. Thus its print material--much of which is on poor quality paper originating with record manufacturers during the Depression era--is subject to use restrictions analogous to those applied to rare and delicate original sound recordings.

Regrettably, lack of funds and manpower has made the carrying out of urgent preservation work in both the sound recordings and print materials field an agonizingly slow process. As far as we can determine, virtually every major research library throughout the world is faced with this problem on the broadest possible scale; within this context it appears that sound recordings and related print materials hardly stand as top priority items. It will take special funding from well-capitalized sources with a genuine stake in the recorded sound area to bring about a change in this respect.

At its present stage of development the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound services some 4,000 on-premises users yearly, with the ratio of sound materials to print materials use running approximately 2:1. The relatively compact third-floor listening area can accommodate about a dozen readers and an absolute maximum of fourteen at the ten listening stations. Service hours are from noon to 6:00 P.M., Mondays through Saturdays. All Archives operations are handled by a staff of seven--two part-time and five full-time members with the latter comprising three librarians, one supervising audio technician, and one technical assistant. Archives operations are carried out on the basis of a 35-hour work week. Thus it should become clear to any who read this that the Archives are delivering a maximum basic service with a minimum



basic staff!

A small matter of information

Users of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound see only the third-floor area with its listening carrels, card catalog, reference desk, and open shelves offering the most frequently used basic reference books and some forty current periodicals. But the heart of the Archives is in the vast basement area accommodating the stacks with some 300,000-plus sound recordings on disc and tape, the public service playback facilities, and the recording laboratory.

Over the past decade an annual average of 13,000 items in the form of sound recordings alone come to the Archives, chiefly in the form of private and corporate donations--a very limited amount of funding is available for highly selective purchase-acquisition purposes. As these items come in, they must be counted, acknowledged, sorted and checked for both new or duplicate status, as well as for condition, against current holdings. In general the proportion of 78 rpm discs received compared to LP discs runs approximately 10:1. There are also received substantial quantities of tapes, acetate discs and 16-inch transcription pressings. Discs are shelved in both regular library and in heavy utility shelves, while tapes are placed in nonmetallic shelves (we have found wooden milk bottle boxes very useful). Because the Archives facilities benefit from an effective measure of temperature-humidity control throughout the year, we feel that for the present we can risk storing our fairly modest cylinder holdings (save for the unique Maplesons!) in polystyrene wine racks of the type found in many liquor stores.

Because the overall collection of sound recordings materials at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives is relatively undeveloped in terms of definitive searching as compared to the longer established divisions of the New York Public Library, much time over the past few years has been devoted simply to getting duplicate disc materials to the point where the genuinely surplus items can be separated from those to be held as "back-up" items. But the time is now in sight where the Archives

can look forward to embarking on a systematic exchange program for those surplus duplicates in good condition-- a program to be confined to other institutional archives both in the United States and overseas.

However, unquestionably the most urgent and nagging problem afflicting operations at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives is that of providing maximum user access to the great bulk of those sound recordings materials which do not require prior preservation taping. As with any major collection developed for research purposes, the chief channel of user access is through the catalog, whether it be in book form, card form, or computer read-out. The public catalog at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives at the time of this writing is wholly in card format, while print materials cataloging--as with the other research libraries divisions--is divided between card format for items acquired prior to 1971 and dictionary book format for all items acquired thereafter.

At the time of its opening in late 1965, the public catalog of sound recordings consisted essentially of the cards prepared under Philip L. Miller's direction, chiefly for the 78 rpm discs acquired during the pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives era, and of the cards, chiefly for long-play discs, prepared especially for the Archives under Jean Bowen's direction with funding from the original Rodgers and Hammerstein Foundation grant. To this was added in 1966 the card catalog accompanying the donation by radio station WNEW of its vast collection of popular and jazz single discs--45 and 78 rpm. While the performer section of this catalog has been weeded out to reflect the actual discs delivered to the Archives, the song-title cards have been left intact, since they serve as an invaluable reference tool in their own right.

Upon assuming charge of Archives operations in 1967, this writer found that no further funds were available for a special cataloging staff comparable to that which accomplished the remarkable job for the long-play discs in the collection through 1965. Such additional disc cataloging as had been done by the remaining Archives staff covered for the most part only long-play discs received from record company donations. A substantial start also had been made toward developing

a basic tape catalog, much of it developed from the comprehensive collection of opera performance tapes--largely air checks belonging originally to Barbara Stone and acquired by the Archives. Minimum basic "finding lists" also had been compiled covering holdings of major recorded performance and documentation on transcription and acetate discs, as well as of the very important collection of piano music recordings, both historical and relatively recent, acquired from the estate of Jan Holcman.

Meanwhile, an ever-increasing backlog was building up both of long-play discs donated from private sources and more importantly of historic 78 rpm discs--the latter being headed by some 9,000 chiefly operatic and vocal items given by G. Lauder Greenway. In addition to this came a half-dozen or so major jazz collections.

In the absence of special funding and staffing it was decided to concentrate on creating maximum access for long-play materials and to deal with the 78's for the present by annotating the margins of major published discographies, where available. Likewise, the catalog of tapes was to be kept as thoroughly up-to-date as possible; and in any event all discs, once they were determined as being new to the collection, were to be shelved in company and serial-number order--so that even if not represented in the public catalog or on a "finding list," there would still be a measure of minimum accessibility to a user seeking an item by company and serial number.

By the end of 1973, these efforts resulted in a post-1965 catalog of long-play discs as large in size and larger in units covered than the original one prepared under the Rodgers and Hammerstein Foundation grant. Summing up the accessibility figures in rough form as of mid-1973, we find that out of an estimated 300,000 sound recordings items, approximately 91,000 are fully accessible through the public catalog; 37,000 are accessible by way of finding lists or annotated discographies; while 103,000 remain minimally accessible. The balance of some 76,000 falls into the category of duplicates--not necessarily surplus.

As of this writing serious efforts are underway to

think through the information processing dilemma, not only in terms of basic funding and manpower, but also in terms of pooled efforts with other archival institutions and, for that matter, with the record industry itself. One clear fact has emerged at this point, and that is the need to make a distinction between retrospective and prospective materials processing. Thus 78 rpm discs fall wholly into the retrospective category, while the long-play discs in substantial measure may be designated as prospective. Because the information processing of long-play materials is on-going, with thousands of new items being issued every month (at least 3,000 of these reaching the Archives every year), any special financing for this type of processing is likely to be subsumed under the heading of "operating expenses" and thus not eligible in most instances for the normal type of foundation grant. Information processing of 78 rpm discs, since these for all practical purposes ceased being issued by 1955, can be treated in terms of a finite project and as such is more likely to find favor with foundation grant sources. Such is the very preliminary view of the situation at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives at this time.

It does seem all too apparent that, even with refinements of technique in making use of Library of Congress phonorecord cards and the development of other logistical devices, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives under its present staffing setup will not accomplish much beyond barely keeping up with its backlog of long-play disc materials, plus a gradual making of inroads into its holdings of transcription discs, as well as acetates, as they find their way onto tape that can be directly serviced for audition. We do have hopes, however, that within the next few years a major project--possibly in collaboration with one or more other archives, will be undertaken for a significant sector of our 78-rpm disc holdings. Since the estimated information processing capacity of the present Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives staff appears to be limited to approximately 4,000 items per year, it is hoped that some form of endowment financing will become available so that additional manpower can be acquired to help bridge the gap between rate of new acquisition and rate of use accessibility via the public catalog.

Of course there has been much discussion over the past several years concerning the potential of data processing techniques as applied to the problems noted here, most especially the MARC II Music Format as developed at the Library of Congress. But its actual application on a wide scale and on a pooled basis through computer terminals seems a long way off; meanwhile, the on-going problem of acquisition rate versus user accessibility is with us every day.

### A look toward the future

As the broadcasting cliché puts it, the views expressed in what has been said thus far are not necessarily those of the New York Public Library administration. What is said in the paragraphs to follow are in the nature of purely personal views, developed not only through past experience of nearly 35 years, but also through the recent years of association and "rapping" with colleagues of ARSC and IASA.

First, let it be said that so long as I have the privilege of carrying out present responsibilities at the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, I shall exert every possible effort to keep the stance of the Archives as one of constructive and creative collaboration with other archives and with archival-minded private collectors--this toward the end of preserving the cultural heritage represented in the body of recorded sound and of developing useful and useable information from it. As a corollary to this, I propose to continue working to help bring about legislation and contractual agreements that eventually will legitimize unequivocally free exchange between archival institutions of tape duplicates of unique sound recordings materials--this subject of course to fair compensation where legally due to legitimate proprietary and/or copyright owners. The principle here is essentially that of achieving maximum accessibility together with just recompense--a principle I believe the Founding Fathers had in mind in promulgating the basic foundation for copyright.

Of equally crucial importance, as I see it, is the task of developing a maximum collaborative effort between archives, as well as with the recording industry and with private collectors, toward the end of eventual establishment

of a data processed union catalog of sound recordings both national and international in scope. It seems generally agreed that no institution, save for certain state-owned broadcasting organizations, have the resources--financial or technological--to take on this task. However, beginnings can be made on even a modest level when a few institutions at the proper state of collection and information-processing development pool their know-how and resources.

From time to time the question has been asked whether the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound would extend its activities into the oral history field, especially in view of the riches to be mined from person-ages in the performing arts field who make constant use of and donations to the research facilities at Lincoln Center. I have given long and hard thought to this question--and for the present, remain of the opinion that oral history work is an enterprise comparable to skilled journalistic or possibly even psychiatric interviewing, that in any event it involves the producing of recorded sound artifact not too different in kind from a broadcast, and as such would require the services of a special staff of skilled interviewers, not to mention a first-rate producer-editor. As I see it, the job of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives is the archiving, not the production of recorded sound artifacts (though we do handle a modest amount of concert and special events taping) and the development of useful information concerning the provenance of its archival holdings. Now our position in this respect is not rigid, but in terms of priorities, this is as good a way as any of expressing it. We are happy to act as a repository for oral history materials in whatever form they come to us, and indeed have some quite fascinating holdings in this area. However, accumulating and cataloging oral history materials is a quite different thing from originating and developing a program along this line. Whatever does happen in the future in the way of an oral history program at the Performing Arts Research Center of the New York Public Library, I see it as a separately staffed and funded program, the product of which would then be entrusted to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives in its custodial and service capacity.

On the production front, however, it is my earnest hope that the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of

Recorded Sound will be able one day to manage the luxury not only of issuing its own publications in monographic format, devoted primarily to illuminating significant facets of its own holdings, but also to contributing on a broad scale to the lore and knowledge of records and recorded sound. Some of us at the New York Public Library have a slogan--"one library, multiple access points"--this referring to our hopes for operation of the library as an organizational entity. I for one hope to live long enough to see the day when the combination of technology and creative imagination will make this a fact nationwide and worldwide!

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