

STANDARDS FOR THE REVIEW OF
DISCOGRAPHIC WORKS

by

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The retrospective collecting and appreciation of sound recordings is not only a growing hobby and an area of investment, but an emerging field of scholarship. The preservation of sound, evolving through the changes in recording technology, has been with us nearly a century. The earliest sound artifacts (wax cylinders, Berliner discs, etc.) have assumed the status of antiques, as have the devices upon which they are played. The engraved disc record will undoubtedly be itself obsolete a few hundred years hence. We are presently at the end of recording's incanabula period.

Those of us interested in chronocling the retrospectives of recording enjoy a number of advantages not shared with the print historian. Many physical developments which accompanied the industrial revolution have left their fossils in the patent register, museums, and libraries. The spor of litigation, the royalty system, the corporate income tax, union bookkeeping needs, and mass marketing have left mountains of paper from which history can be sifted. There is a constantly expanding interest in those whose art was captured, in the repertory recorded, in the activities of the manufacturers of these recordings, and the means by which these sounds are preserved and best reproduced.

Such information is included in discographies. From simple title lists, little more than excerpts from catalogs, they have evolved into complex and informative studies through an understanding of the principles underlying the production processes and information extractable from visible manufacturing and marketing controls.

Discographies have been, and still are, compiled by more (or less) well informed amateurs. The accuracy, trustworthiness, and resultant reliability on their

publications in discographic applications depends on what information is included and how well the compiler understands that information.

Efforts are being made to preserve what raw data still exists, but the toll of time is considerable on what are essentially ephemeral business records. Much additional information falls into the category of "things everyone knows," and tends to be forgotten with the passage of time and of those who knew them.

This is the time to assemble and publish this information as accurately as possible, even if it means a researcher must restrict the scope of their publication to better concentrate on the correctness and completeness of what it contains. We have, or will soon have, the tools.

Information about recordings is organized into discographies, which are listings of the recordings within certain limits, including all relevant information about each item.

Discographies are more necessary to the serious record user and collector than are bibliographies to his opposite number in bookdom. A recording must be heard in the clearest, truest sound possible, with an appreciation of pertinent artistic, mechanical, and marketing factors, so that the listener can arrive at a valid understanding of what he hears. Its use goes beyond identifying the existence of an item or determining the authentic first edition, to describing those particulars which lead to this proper use and consequent understanding. This careful description is needed due to the complex nature of sound recordings which involves a hierarchy of operation, each with its own variables. The clear presentation of these is the business of discography.

The written, printed, or improvised text is usually the starting place - that work to be recorded in interpretable work. Formal bibliographic citation or other positive method should unequivocally identify what is performed.

The performer is certainly the major factor. He creates the sound from the text, interpreting, introducing his personal vocal or instrumental quality, as distinctive as a fingerprint, determining the limits of his means of expression by the state of his technique, to which he adds performance practice (whether he realizes it or not), and a moment-to-moment reaction to each element under his control. Each take of each record is therefore a unique item.

The process and circumstances of recording also affect the finished result. Technology limited what would be done in the studio, particularly with older recordings. Sometimes, when an instrument might record weakly, it was necessary to alter it to be better caught by the old horn process. A record may have been deliberately slowed down to squeeze a long selection on one side, the record company assuming the buyer would set the proper key against his parlor piano. Standard playing speed and groove width and depth occurred relatively late with flat discs. Until the advent of tape, each side had to be performed intact. This frequently led to an intensity of concentration paralleling that of the concert situation.

The revolutionary development was not the long playing record (which is, after all, merely a device on which the finished recording is marketed) but the conversion to tape in the studio. Therefore, with the advent of tape, the significance of matrix numbers is much diminished. For, with the advent of tape, rough places could be spliced smooth and, if all else failed, another *deus* could be brought in to pacify the *machina*. Such events, when known or strongly rumored, should be properly noted with the source discographically identified, as when Schwartzkopf filled in a couple of high notes for Flagstad after the Norwegian could no longer reach them.

The possibilities of creating sound after the performer leaves the studio, through echo, electronic stereo, multi-channel mixing, and the whole engineers bag of tricks, requires close attention to whom is responsible for what. The producer's role in popular music emerges as that of another, and sometimes the

primary, artist.

Finally, there is marketing. A study of the early Paramount or Compo catalogs cannot ignore the countless number of other labels under which a recording reached a variety of shops and mail-order distributors, and eventually the consumer, all from a single, unique 78 matrix. LP mail-order club issues were often cut and pressed to different standards than the same item distributed through retail shops.

Since originals today are all taped, each can be published in a seemingly infinite number of configurations: LP, stereo, 7", 10", 12", promotional records, jukebox 33's & 45's, and a plethora of tape and video packagings. Each issue is as close to the source tape as the next! The discographer must account for them all; not to do so is to make a value judgement by omission. Liner notes, covers; all are part of the finished record and should be chronicled in their place.

A discography indicates, identifies, and organizes these variable in the clearest way possible - not that most appealing to the compiler's sense of order but in that which makes the information most unambiguously accessible to the user.

There are six basic discographic arrangements (excluding those in the ethnomusicological field). Each calls for the inclusion of specific information, as each such item has a function within that particular type of discography. Most offer options in the ordering of these materials. Without including these items the user will not be able to extract all the information he is entitled to find, and will either be forced to research the missing factual material himself, do without, or wait for the job to be done properly.

The discographer should examine every piece of material he cites or, if this proves impossible, indicate from which secondary sources his information comes. It doesn't hurt to listen to the records, either.

Less complete or less accurate studies, done for the compiler's personal pleasure, should not be offered

to the public in scholarly attire, unless presented as an accumulation of information to be completed by others, an advanced discographic source. The chart which follows contains the basic items of discographic information and an indication as to the type of discography in which each belongs.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF DISCOGRAPHY	GROUPINGS					
	Performer Discography	Company Matrix	Company Issue N	Solo or Voice	Inst. Musical Period	Genre
Standard title	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Record title	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Language, if not original	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Primary performer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other personnel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Manufacturer's name	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Date of recording ¹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Place of Recording ²	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Mastered on disc or tape	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Matrix & take no. ³ (Disc master)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Timing in proper pitch (tape)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Nice	Nice	Nice
Playing speed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Timing in proper pitch (disc master)	Yes	Yes	Nice	Nice	Nice	Nice
Recording engineer & other important tech. personnel	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Size	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Original Issue no.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Original issue date ⁴	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Original label	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Later issue nos.	Yes	Yes	Nice	Yes	Nice	Nice
Issue nos. for other countries	Yes	Yes	No	Nice	Nice	Nice
Couplings	Yes	No	-	No	No	No
Side & band nos. (LPs,EPs)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Noncommercial issues ⁵	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Notes	Pert	No	Yes	Pert	Pert	Pert
Distinctive (45s,78s)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Dubbings & reissues	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indexed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ORDERING OF DISCOGRAPHIES						
Matrix no.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Issue no.	Yes but...	No	Yes	No	No	No
Recording date	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Composition date	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

ORDERING OF GROUPINGS
 DISCOGRAPHIES (cont)

	Performer	Company	Company	Solo	Inst.	Musical	Genre
	Discography	Matrix	Issue	N or	Voice	Period	
Alphabetical-Composer	No	No	No	Yes		Yes	Yes
Alphabetical-Title	No	No	No	Yes		Yes	Yes
Alphabetical-Perform.	Yes	No	No	Yes		No	Yes

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

PERFORMER. A biography is desirable, sometimes necessary

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|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| • 1 - ARSC 7 | <u>ABBREVIATIONS</u> |
| • 2 - ARSC 7 | Pert - If pertinent |
| • 3 - ARSC 3&4 | Nice - it would be nice, but not vital |
| • 4 - ARSC 5 | Yes but... - Passable, but other ways are preferred |
| • 5 - ARSC 1 | |

Many lists and articles are called discographies - that does not mean they are. They include: SELECTIVE RECORD LISTS. These are usually limited to composer, performer, and manufacturer's name and number, are seldom international in scope, make no attempt to be complete (though, perhaps, pretence of same), and usually reflect what was in print in the country for which the listing is intended at the time of compilation (which usually precedes the publication date by a fair amount). They are usually found in the back pages of composer or performer biographies or appended to magazine articles, and are often no more than the author's acknowledgement of receipt of free records from the companies concerned. They are less accurate than the country's general catalog, what with cut-outs, reissues, and renumberings and the like. It is their parochial incompleteness which makes them unreliable for later consultation and which disqualifies them as discographies. RECOMMENDED LISTENING LISTS. These are suggested recordings to illustrate points in a text or to supply additional listening along the same lines. Such books range from the scholarly through standard classroom historical surveys to introductory guides of a popular nature. Their intent is to suggest recordings which illustrate points in the book. The examples may be fragmentary - their discographic value certainly so. COMPARATIVE REVIEWS. Magazines run surveys of all the recordings by a particular composer or artist or in a particular genre, which may be in print at a given time, and sometimes calls them discographies. They are, if

you will, suites of reviews.

DISCOGRAPHIC SOURCES. A bibliography of discographic sources, so identified, would be a most useful tool. The author of this article has two rooms full of such items, ranging from old catalogs and discographies and runs of record magazines to many large file drawers and notebooks. Their content, filed by artist, record company, and various other subjects, varies from xerox's of articles in which the performer's records are compared with his sound in concert (useful when making dubs), to obituaries, photos of recording sessions, trade press announcements, Jim Walsh's and Aida Favia-Artsay's articles from *Hobbies*, notes about playing speeds, etc. They should (but do not usually) include the appropriate pages from the recording logs and artist contracts. These are all grist for the discographic mill, as are magazine articles which discuss recording sessions (*High Fidelity* and *Billboard* carry some), reviews which list mislabelings or misascriptions, personnel not listed on the record or jacket, identify originals of reissues, etc. All are sources, however, not discographies.

FIRST EDITIONS

There is presently only one field of record collecting which places strong emphasis on first editions - rock and roll (through c.1958/9) and, to a lesser extent, later rock - with a consequent effect on record values. These values also depend on the degree to which the original package is complete (picture sleeve, inclusion of premiums, etc.) and emphasizes original company and label.

Serious collections of other recordings place a premium on the quietest pressing obtainable (except for incanabula, which has its own rules). Presently, no serious effort is made to determine priority of publication for items which appeared internationally. But it is important to remember that by 1956 78s had pretty well disappeared from dealer's shops and there is now over half the U. S. population to which 78rpm recordings were always artifacts. Given the present

day emphasis on collectables, the interest in first editions will increase. Where else would one expect to find the keys to identification of these first editions but in discographies?

Thus, both manufacturer's number and artist discographies should include the information by which first editions may be determined.

That most of this information does not exist in useable form today is immaterial. Until it does, all work done now will have to be redone in the future. So it is time to consider the creation of these tools. They are:

- A numerical list of all the matrices recorded by each company, dated and indexed (a section of which is currently underway at the Yale Collection of Historical Sound Recordings);
- a numerical list of all the issue numbers of each company, also dated and indexed, listing all performers - accompanists as well as soloists - with cross references to earlier and later issue numbers (being compiled at the Edward Johnson Music Library at the University of Toronto); and
- an illustrated chronology of each company's label designs, with explanations as to why design changes were made, each variant date (currently in preparation by the author of this article).

BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF DISCOGRAPHIES

The overwhelming need for bibliographic access to published discographic information is now well recognized and is being met, in great part, through the cooperative cumulation which appears annually in this magazine. A specialist's knowledge is required to cover each area. Many entries are extracted from obscure sources not covered by the standard music or entertainment bibliographies. Some of the best work being done today is printed in mimeographed magazines of irregular appearance. An important trend is publication of discographies interviews, and other items of collector interest as part of dealer sale or auction lists.

A listing of discographies in bibliographic format requires a knowledge of both fields of study: where they overlap, where they differ, and a fair amount of familiarity with the history of recording. From the previous discussion it follows that the usefulness of a discography is a direct result of the information it contains. Standards are still evolving, so each entry must not only be cited but described in sufficient detail that a user will be led to the one which promises the information he requires and away from that which, lacking it, wastes his time. This later group is usually either pioneering efforts or badly done contemporary lists by those with little understanding and much enthusiasm.

The compiler is required to inspect and evaluate each item before listing. Annotations may be a luxury in a bibliography, but they are mandatory for discographies. The ARSC annual cumulation uses numbers keyed to the inclusion of certain elements, the key appearing in a table before each year's listing. These numbers are also shown on the preceding chart, identified by "ARSC" and the number used by ARSC to denote this item.