



# Anything Phonographic

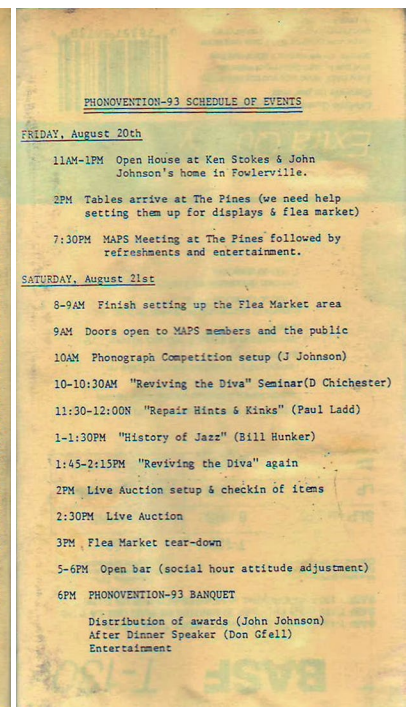
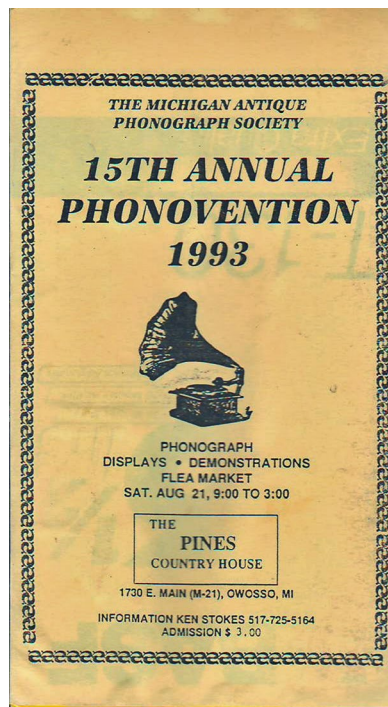
by Steve Ramm



By the time you read this column, it'll be time for organized phonograph and record shows for those looking for that item they need to fill their collection with. Me? I've sort of wound down but I have some Europe travel plans and will always keep my eyes out for something small. This month I have a bunch of wonderful new finds to share including some things you'll need your computer for.

**History Preserved - the Original Phonograph Conferences** – As many of you know the current Antique Phonograph Society absorbed the former Michigan Antique Phonograph Society (MAPS) in 2013. MAPS was founded in 1976 by seven collectors who met at an auction in Charlotte, Michigan. They soon gathered 4 more and started having monthly meetings at a member's house. Soon, the word got out around the country – and the world (BEFORE the internet arrived) and one of the founders, John Whitacre, decided to publish a Newsletter – soon to be a Journal titled *In The Groove*. It was somewhere in the 1980s (I can't remember the date) that I volunteered to write a monthly "news and review" column titled *Anything Phonographic*. That column continues to this day (and I never missed an issue! – that's a lot of columns), That small group who founded MAPS grew to a membership/circulation of over 1000 before it was absorbed into the current publication. During its life *ITG* had only two editors. Since folks around the world wanted to meet, the local members in mid-Michigan began what became an annual weekend "show and sale" in October (near Edison's birthday) and called it the **Phonovention**.

These were held from at least 1990 through 1999 and were similar to the current "Show and Banquet" hosted by APS in August, but MAPS had scheduled lectures and talks during the day (when sale tables were covered). One "regular" at these events was the late-Rev. John A. Petty, who drove from North Carolina with his video camera and captured nearly the full events – even using the LP speed to get as much as he could on a VHS cassette. I did fly to Lansing for one Phonovention but depended on John's tapes to let me experience them at home. Last year I found that I had five of the tapes from 1990 through 1999 and being an archivist per se wanted the world to see them. A lot of the participants have passed on (and their



collections disbursed through auctions) and younger collectors should know the pioneers of the hobby. Collector Sammy Jones offered to digitize the tapes and post him on his You Tube Channel and I accepted. At least 3 years are done now (some are in two parts because of length) with the rest coming soon. To make them easier to find, I created a Playlist which lists them, and I encourage you to watch on your large screen TV. Here is the link to that Playlist: <https://tinyurl.com/4vzn7ze2>

**The nearly complete “King of Jazz” Recordings for a budget price** - In March I told you about a 319-page paperback - *Beyond the Bandstand: Paul Whiteman in American Music Culture* (Univ. of Illinois Press) – which consists of eight essays about the legendary conductor Paul Whiteman, whose career began in 1920 (when he was 30, and recording his orchestra acoustically) through the late 1950s, when he was hosting a children’s talent show on Philadelphia television. The guy was certainly prolific and the folks at Acrobat Records in the UK have just issued a huge (in terms of tracks) pair of box sets containing 219 (!) songs recorded between 1920 and 1954. There were more, but the cut-off is due to rights issues. The first set, **The Paul Whiteman Orchestra: Whispering – The Hits Collection**, covers 1920-1927 and, on five CDs, gives you 113 sides. The second, titled **Smoke Gets In Your Eyes** packs in another 106 recordings (ending with a vocal version of the song that led off Volume 1, recorded 34 years earlier). While many of the tracks with vocals appear on the later set – when you hear Billie Holiday making her debut – Billy Murray is there with the American Quartet in 1924 on “Did I kiss that girl?” “As with every Acrobat CD I’ve reviewed there is full discographic data and well-researched liner notes by their resident annotator Paul Watts. The booklets are 24 and 28 pages each, (Note each volume sold separately. The transfers (by label owner John Cooper) are nice and clean.



**Some Lead Belly News** – I previously told you about a new documentary film on the iconic folk singer Huddie Ledbetter (better known as Lead Belly) that was playing film festivals. I’m thrilled to say that the 80-minute film - **Lead Belly: The Man Who Invented Rock & Roll** is now available on DVD for home viewing. Produced by Ledbetter’s great grandnephew, Alvin Singh, this film took over 15 years to make as you will note that many of the luminaries interviewed are now deceased, including Oscar Brand, Harry Belafonte, Odetta, B.B. King, Janis Joplin, Pete Seeger and Singh’s grandmother “Tiny” Robinson. Very much with us are archivists Jeff Place and Kip Lornell. I’ve been lucky to have as a friend Singh’s sister Terika Dean, who manages the Estate. I also wanted to update you on that recently discovered full recording of a private concert of Lead Belly made in 1966 that was planned for a Spring release by Document Records. Because additional photos have been found, the label informed me that it would be delayed until at least Fall 2025

**Probably the two best books I’ll read this year** – I don’t really buy limited release records that come out on the Annual Record Store Day held every April but I was alerted to something “special” coming from producer and label owner Josh Rosenthal from the Tompkins Square label, and once I saw the advance .pdf of the 170-page hardbound book I knew I needed the physical version. It was just too good not

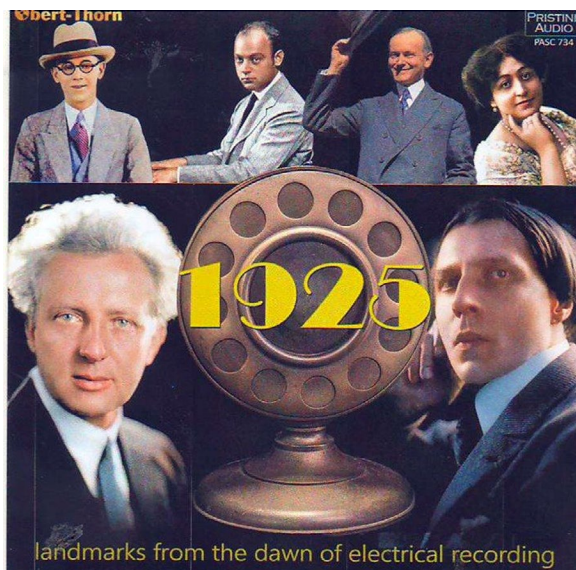


to hold in my lap (it's 12x12 and weighs 2 ½ pounds) and read as well as admiring the graphics. So, I sought out a copy by mail order and I'm thrilled. (Josh did tell me that, though it had to be ordered by INDEPENDENT record stores to sell, he may have extras. Titled **Treasures Untold: A Modern 78rpm Reader**, the book features 12 essays by 78 collectors (some, like Jerry Zolten and John Heneghan – both connected with Robert Crumb – and Joe Lauro of Historic Films) are known to the 78 community, as is Dick Spottswood, interviewed here by Ian Nagoski. A young collector, Jay Burnett, now only 14 but who started

at age seven and, even now, has a weekly streaming radio show, fills his 16 pages with an essay written as if by a veteran. He has a steady head on his shoulders too; he has a hard and fast rule of keeping his collection at 800 discs -when he gets a new one another must go. I mean, I just love his enthusiasm and knowledge. The graphics of labels and photos are gorgeous. As if that wasn't enough to recommend, Rosenthal has included an exclusive CD with 2 songs from the Tompkins Square label and eight new ones of old tunes by contemporary artists including Heneghan's band (featuring Crumb). Contact the label ([www.tompkinssquare.com](http://www.tompkinssquare.com)) to see if they still have any left.

I have to thank my friend Brenda Nelson-Strauss for turning me on to the book **Ink: The Indelible J. Mayo Williams** (Univ. of Illinois Press). I'm only halfway through the 316-page softbound volume but I'm so engrossed it's going slow. Like me, you probably don't recognize his name, but Williams was a star football player and a pioneer Black in the early NFL where he was playing with Paul Robeson but not on the same team. Okay, Robeson sang and belongs here in this column. But why Williams? Well, because he moved on after a legendary football career to record artists like Ma Rainey and Blind Lemon Jefferson and he produced records by King Oliver and Ida Cox and more blues artists for the Black Swan, Black Patti and Paramount labels. Author Clifford Murphy, Director of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife writes so well, you can almost SEE Williams filling his roles There is a 10-page section in the center with black and white photos.

**2025 Marks a Century for these two events** – It was 1925 when “electrical recording” came to the commercial recording industry. Actually, there was a recording of a “Recessional” recorded electronically by a choir at Westminster Abby in 1920, but no electrical recording was ISSUED by Victor or



Columbia until 1925. Recording engineer Mark Obert-Thorn (who worked for the Philadelphia Orchestra until his recent retirement) gathered a wonderful, and diverse, collection of these rare records and produced an album – **1925: landmarks from the dawn of electrical recording** – for the Pristine Audio label in the UK and it's a must for anyone interested in recorded sound history. The album is available as a physical two-CD set or as a download. The variety is wide. The earliest issued by Victor was a “personal recording” by the Mask & Wig Glee Chorus from Philadelphia. There is the 9-minute-plus “A Miniature Concert” by the Eight Popular Victor Artists (Billy Murray, Monroe Silver, Henry Burr and five more). Mr. Jesse Crawford is at the organ for a popular tune but the real gem here is the first complete release of “Inauguration of President Calvin Coolidge” (all 23 minutes of it!). Listening to it with the current discussion of immigration will give you chills. Rather going into more detail, I will provide you with a link to download Obert-Thorn's notes. <https://tinyurl.com/jc7jfutx>

It was the fall of 1925 when the legendary Country radio show – the *Grand Ole Opry* – first went on the air on WSM in Nashville and though it's moved a good distance from the office of the Insurance Company where it started – it is still on the air. From 1925 to 1968, over 2200 weekly shows aired on AM radio (and later TV) and only when Dr. Martin Luther King died was a performance cancelled. In honor of the show's centenary, the Opry (owned by Opry Entertainment) created a massive 352-page book (weighing in at four pounds!) full of stories, photos and graphic ephemera. **100 Years of Grand Ole Opry** (Abrams) is divided into quarter-century chapters and the 78 era (to 1952) fills the first third.



**My report on the annual Folk Alliance Conference in February** – I've been attending this annual conference (this year in snowy Montreal) since 2008 and always find performers to share with you! As always there were panels on historical icons. Both Woody Guthrie's granddaughter and the aforementioned great-grandniece of Leadbelly hosted panels and I found a few artists who carry on the styles of old recordings. One was musician Lotus Wight from Canada who actually records his sessions on his Presto disc recorder. You can see an example here: <https://tinyurl.com/38ftzky5>. I discovered a brilliant mandolin player from Montreal - Jonathan Belanger- who plays popular music from early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Here's his showcase which I hope you enjoy: <https://tinyurl.com/3ueka6z7>

**With the cost of postage, albums are going “digital”** – It's been (literally) years since I last got a new album by one of my favorite “twenties” artists – Janet Klein. The Los Angeles-based singer (and ukulele player) seems to live like she was stuck in the 1920/early 1930s – in both voice, dress, hairstyle and voice. Think Fanny Brice, Baby Rose Marie or Helen Kane. Her husband Robert Loveless has a great talent for art direction and each of her CDs in





my collection is a 5x6- inch piece of art. This year she decided to release both a four-track EP (Humming to Myself) and a 12-song album (Mutiny in The Parlor) which are both available to download on the Bandcamp website. (<https://janetklein.bandcamp.com/music>). Her earlier albums are still available as physical products and you can see (and sample them) on her website (along with some great videos) at <https://janetklein.com/>. If you've had a rough day, play a few Janet recordings and I'll bet you start smiling!

Finally, I know there are readers who collect postcards showing phonographs or records. (I do). I recently met an Australian graphic artist on eBay who designed a series of 3 new colorful hand drawn art deco cards with unclothed women listening to horn gramophones and records. Consider them "R-rated". His name is Patrick Bousseton and he will autograph each card upon request. I don't want to offend anyone, so I'm not including a photo. You can contact him at pbousseton @pyb.com.au if you wish to see his designs.

Well, that's all there is space for this month. I love hearing from you, drop me an email

Steve Ramm, 420 Fitzwater St., Philadelphia, PA 19147 (e-mail: [Stevenramm@aol.com](mailto:Stevenramm@aol.com))



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