



ANYTHING Phonographic

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This month I'll pick up with updated reviews of two DVDs I mentioned only briefly last issue and then move on to some new items that arrived in the last eight weeks. But first I want to say it was great to see MAPS members at the ARSC Conference in Kansas City in May. It was a good mix of private collectors and institutional archivists. As private collectors of records and phonographs we need to learn from these experts on how best to preserve the sounds we treasure. ARSC members will be able to hear all this year's presentations on the web site by the time you read this column. (Pre-2012 sessions are available to all on the site as well). May 2014 will find ARSC in Chapel Hill, NC.

Update on those DVDs – Nick Pavone's film, *Phonograph Conversations*, is now officially finished and available for purchase. Over a ten-year period, Pavone traveled to visit such well-known collectors and Edison historians as Paul Israel (Director of the Edison Papers Project), Jack Stanley at the Edison Museum in Menlo Park and David Giovanonni (who traveled to France to discover the world's oldest voice recording (Scott's Phonograph)). As I mentioned last time, he visited *ITG* contributor Shawn Borri, and recorded Borri making (actually baking) new wax cylinders in his kitchen. Pavone was lucky to be filming when both Walter Cronkite and Peter Jennings visited the Menlo Park museum to record wax cylinders. The short piece that Jennings records will put a lump in your throat. Pavone brings "recorded sound" into the 21st century with an interview with pop producer Nile Rodgers (remember the band Chic?). By using the experts to discuss the subject, Pavone gets his facts right. The only thing that I thought could be improved (and Pavone and I discussed this) is that, rather than using original period music behind the speakers discussing Edison and his invention, Pavone chose a score of what sounds like Indian (as in the country) music that distracts the viewer. The film now has its own website where you can see the trailer, learn more, and order the DVD. It is www.phonographconversations.com

The other DVD I was only able to preview for the last column was *Michael Feinstein's American Songbook – Season Three* (Hudson West/PBS), produced and directed by Amber

Edwards but "curated" by Feinstein himself for the home DVD release. As most of you know, Feinstein, in addition to being a superb interpreter of the "American song", is a passionate collector and archivist in his own right and each episode of his PBS show features visits to collectors as well as recording engineers. These PBS shows are essential for readers of this column. If you saw these three one-hour episodes on TV, you are still missing half the fun without owning the DVD (oddly enough there is no Bluray version this time). The three broadcast episodes are on one DVD while the other contains over 90 minutes of both "live" and archival performances, more than half are rare clips from TV or film, divided into "Guys" (Fred Astaire, singing and them playing piano!, Sinatra, Chevalier), "Girls" (Ginger Rogers as a brunette, and the piece de resistance, Rose Marie in 1951 singing "This is it!") and "Battle of the Bands" (Red Nichols, Cab Calloway and Liberace!). It's all wonderful and – as I said, a must see. Available on Amazon and www.pbs.org/michael-feinsteins-american-songbook.

A wonderful DVD mystery series that mixes 1920s jazz with a sexy sleuth – One of my true discoveries this month is the DVD release of an Australian TV mystery series that has only played on a few US Public TV stations. *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries – Series 1* (Acorn), is based on a series of novels by Kerry Greenwood (a name not familiar to me). It stars actress Essie Davis as "flapper-style" private detective in Melbourne, who evokes the feminist of the "jazz age". Like HBO's series *Boardwalk Empire*, which takes place during the same period – but there is less violence and rough language here - jazz recordings fill the soundtrack (with a rare jazz record playing over the final credits of each of the 13 hour-long episodes as well as throughout). The rest of the cast is perfect as well and can't think of any reader of this column who won't enjoy this DVD set. I understand that a Series 2 is in production and I – for one - can hardly wait! Available at the usual DVD outlets.

"Classic Country" finally comes to DVD – In the past I raved about the DVD series produced by deejay Larry Black titled *Country's Family Reunion* featuring stories and performances by country music legends, many of who have died in recent years and are being preserved through that series. Through a process of



negotiations with the family-held Gannaway production company, Black has secured the rights to release – on DVD for the first time – episodes of the 1955-57 syndicated TV show *Stars of the Grand Ole Opry* which had a brief life by mail order on VHS. Not officially connected to the long running WSM-Radio show (owned by Gaylord Entertainment), this series featured nearly every big name in country music history. Bill Monroe, June Carter, Lonzo and Oscar and Grandpa Jones are just some of the performers in each the 25 minute episodes. Packaged by Black under the title *Golden Years of Classic Country* there are 10 DVDs containing 30 episodes and over 200 performances. These replicate the VHS tapes but have been remastered. Gannaway filmed many more episodes and I'm hoping that Black will release those for the first time. You can see the trailer and order this and the other DVDs at: www.cfrvideos.com

Three more volumes in the “Edison Collection” series from Document Records – After a lull in releases, three new titles were just issued by the British label Document Records, culled from the master tapes of Edison disc masters at the Edison National Historic Park in West Orange NJ, by the late Merritt Malvern and remastered by Larry Tedder. While some of these recordings were issued to the public on disc, most were never commercially released, partly because they were recorded in the late 1920s (for both Diamond Disc (vertical) as well as lateral recordings) just as Edison was closing down his operations in 1929. Each volume covers a different style of music. **Country Music Pioneers on Edison: Volume 2** continues that series and contains 18 tracks, presented chronologically, recorded between 1923 and 1929 by Vernon Dalhart, fiddlers Allen Sisson, Jasper Bisbee and John Baltzell, and Posey Rorer's Carolina Ramblers, finishing with Carson Robison's Madcaps performing “Stuff”, literally days before the plant shut down. **Hawaiian Rainbow: Hawaiian Music on Edison Records** features 18 tracks from 1916 to 1929 including one by the Hilo Serenaders with Dalhart on vocal. The third album, **The B.A. Rolfe Orchestra: Let's Do It** has 18 sides from 1926 to 1929 led by Rolfe under the pseudonyms The Palais D'Or Orchestra and The Lucky Strike Orchestra. All three volumes have two pages of informative liner notes. Available at regular music outlets.

Making the “Old” Beautiful with help of some well-known “folk” – In another delightful project of resurrecting old songs to reach a new audience, producer Paul Marsteller, gathered a group of well-known artists like Britishers Richard Thompson and Graham Parker and Nashville's Kim Richey along with Eric Bibb to record “turn of the century” songs in a wonderful album, **The Beautiful Old (Double)**. The 19 tracks include titles you know like “After The Ball”, “The Band Played On” and “Come Josephine, etc.” were recorded at various studios around the globe and 20-page booklet bound in the digipak contains the lyrics as well as colorful sheet music covers. It's small independent projects like this that deserve our support. More at www.TheBeautifulOld.com.



THAT HAWAIIAN RECORD
(A. Photo: David Price. Text: Adapted from the original 1923 Edison Records Catalog)

More from the CD shelf - Here's a nice selection of vintage reissues that have arrived lately. The Smithsonian Folkways label continues its “Classic” series of CDs, produced by archivist Jeff Place, in which tracks available on other S/F albums are mixed with previously unavailable recordings in the archives. **Classic Harmonica Blues** features 20 tracks from a racially diverse group of musicians such as blues men Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Dr. Ross (the Harmonica Boss), Kentucky mountain musician Roscoe Holcomb and Lovin' Spoonful founder John Sebastian (and his I Band). There is great 36 page booklet of authoritative notes too. **Classic Celtic Music** packs 23 tracks by Scottish, Irish and even French Canadian singers and musicians (and a 40-page booklet of notes and photos) on to the CD. Get info and samples at www.folkways.si.edu.

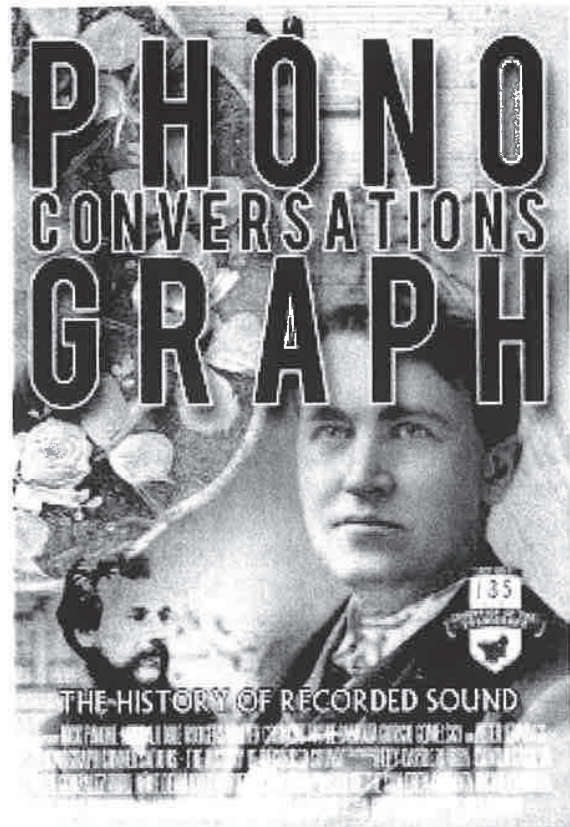
Two CDs of completely opposite musical genres arrived on the British Acrobat label (distributed in the US by Music Video Distributors). Both are lots of fun. First, for jazz fans, comes **Red Nichols & His Five Pennies: Live at Club Hangover, San Francisco 1953**, this 2-CD album contains four complete radio broadcasts of the legendary trumpet player from the sound archives at Stanford University, The four consecutive weekly shows feature Nichols late in his career with a bunch of virtually unknown young musicians playing standards like “Mood Indigo” and “St. Louis Blues” but they are good! What makes three of the shows even

more interesting is that the “intermission performances” feature boogie-woogie piano great Meade Lux Lewis and his trio. Way at the other end of the spectrum is *Open the Door, Richard!* Originally an old vaudeville routine created by Bob Russell in 1919, it was committed to film in 1945 by black comedian Dusty Fletcher. The song inspired by the routine was first recorded (in 1946) by Jack McVea and by 1947 there were so many versions (by Count Basie, Louis Jordan, The Pied Pipers, and The Four Aces, among others) that the song became (according to *Billboard*) the best-selling song of the year! This CD includes 24 versions of the song, or “answer songs” that it spawned (“Richard Gets Hitched”, “The Key’s in The Mailbox”). The 12-page booklet of notes and detailed recording data really adds to the story. A most unique – and fun – compilation!

A correction – of sorts – Last issue I reviewed two interesting CDs on the independent Tompkins Square label – a label whose products I’ve recommended in the past for their packaging – and mentioned that they were transitioning to promote digital download sales rather than the physical product. I received an email from the label asking for a retraction, saying they are very much in the physical product business but just no longer sending physical copies (only downloads) for review. Because I feel that my readers prefer the physical product, and MP3 files are not of the quality of a manufactured CD, I only review physical product. If these arrive in the future from Tompkins Square I’ll certainly cover them here.

New discography of early Black recording artists – The definitive book on pioneer African-American recording artists is, of course, Tim Brooks’ *Lost Sounds* which does include discographic info but now comes a new book *Black Recording Artists, 1877-1926: An Annotated Discography* (McFarland) compiled by Craig Martin Gibbs, a lecturer at Kyoto University in Japan. This 490-page paperback takes an unusual approach because, rather than presenting the information by performer and then recording date, Gibbs uses on the recording date to sequence the listings. Yes, there is an index by title and one by artist in the back of the book (as well as five Appendices, covering piano rolls, films, and recordings made in Mexico and the Caribbean, but, other than knowing the earliest recording (a tin foil by George W. Johnson, cited by Brooks as 1879-1880 but listed here as 1877-1880) and the last one for 1926 (an “unidentified group” recording of “Standing in Need of Prayer”, listed as “pre-1927[?]”). I couldn’t find much use for Gibbs’ sequencing of the data. There is some annotation but mostly he references *Lost Sounds*, and volumes by Brian Rust and the 1997 edition of *Blues and Gospel Records*. The book will still be useful, though I wish it was arranged differently. There are no illustrations included.

Edison Blue Amberol Recordings “By The Numbers” – In another case of something arriving just as I was finishing my column, I received a new release from the folks at Archeophone Records. Known for their great transfers,



informative liner notes, and fine graphics, they have set up a side project to complement their CDs. *Archeophone Archives* is a reissue project where the label is offering volumes consisting of 30 Edison Blue Amberol cylinder records, presented in the order in which they were issued – beginning in 1912, with record number 1501. The first three volumes (1501-1530, 1531-1560 and 1561-1990) are now available as downloads on iTunes and Amazon for a very reasonable \$8.99 per volume. Be aware that Edison recorded some wonderful material (Billy Murray and Cal Stewart) but you’ll also get some schmaltzy songs as well, since the label is including EVERY cylinder. After downloading the tracks you can go to the label’s website (www.archeophone.com/archive) and read- or download – a 10 to 14 page booklet of liner notes (with those great graphics!). As I stated earlier, I’m not a big fan of downloads, and normally review only physical products, but, since this is aimed at the collector who wants a download for cost efficiency, I can certainly recommend the sound quality of the transfers, and – of course – the authoritative liner notes. With the highest number in the *Domestic Popular Series* of Edison Blue Amberols being 5732, this is a project that could go on for years! (If you don’t have download capability, you can contact the label via their website about custom burned CDs of this series.)

Well, that wraps another month. I’ll be back in October with more “disc-overies.

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