



ANYTHING Phonographic

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Here it is the heat of August and I'm thinking of the cool Fall weather when you'll be receiving this issue of *ITG*. It's been a busy summer with lots of interesting things arriving in all formats. I think there's something for just about everyone this month. So, let's get started

A beautiful, informative, and affordable must-have book for Edison Disc collectors - Collector/Author Michael Sherman has, over the years, written and published authoritative books on both the Victor and Columbia disc record labels. Now he has joined forces with fellow collector George Copeland to expand and reissue the (previously text-only) *Collector's Guide to Edison Records* - which Copeland self-published in 1989- in a large 8x10 soft cover volume loaded with gorgeous color illustrations of record labels and sleeves. The Edison disc records were first released in 1912 and Edison continued to produce them until 1929, when his company folded. We are presented with every variation of label style, the composition materials used and a very useful dating chart, that will let you determine when a disc was manufactured (rather than when it was recorded - for that you will need the excellent volumes by Ray Wile). Another useful Appendix is where the actual artist is provided for early black label records; the ones that just said "band" or "tenor" on the etched label. The book is just 80 pages but contains more information than you would find in a book nearly twice the size. And Sherman sought out some discs that are ultra-rare and we might not see elsewhere. The book is very reasonably priced at \$15.95 and so it should find a place on every Edison collector's shelf. You can order from Kurt Nauck at www.78rpm.com.

Entertainers on the air - Two recently arrived books, and a new DVD, are devoted to recording stars' appearances on both radio and TV. First comes *Musicmakers of Network Radio* (McFarland) in which author Jim Fox devotes about 15 pages each to 24 "entertainers" who "spent a significant portion of their careers in front of the radio microphone" between 1926 and 1962. The heyday of radio was the 1940s and so we get essays about Bob Crosby and Rosemary Clooney in the "pop" field, Basso Jerome Hines and Music Director Howard Barlow (*The Bell Telephone Hour*) in the "classical field" and Smilin' Ed McConnell (even more popular

on 1950s kids' TV) in what we might classify as "other". Names I was surprised to see with significant radio careers included Steve Allen, Percy Faith and Red Foley. Like most McFarland books there is a significant number of pages (25) of footnotes in this 370-page softbound book. Much of the material included was new to me. The next book, *One Night on TV is Worth Weeks at the Paramount - Popular Music on Early Television* (Duke Univ. Press) may sound like it falls beyond the usual time period covered in this column but, during the early years of TV (1948-1955) many early recording artists filled the entertainment programming. Author Murray Forman presents an easy to read history of how the "music industry" merged with TV to cross-promote music. Appearances by such record artists as Fred Waring, Desi Arnez, Peggy Lee, and even Ina Ray Hutton and her all-girl band, on TV helped sell their records. Again, there are significant footnotes in this 406-page paperback volume, which contains a small number of black-and-white photos. A new film by German director Reiner E. Moritz, *Music In The Air* (Arthaus Musik, distributed in US by NAXOS) covers "A History of Classical Music on Television" and was commissioned to celebrate 50 years of IMZ - the UNESCO Music+Media Center in Vienna. As far back as the 1936 the BBC was televising concerts and, while no footage of that exists, there are some fascinating clips of Stravinsky conducting his *Firebird* suite at end of his career and Leonard Bernstein with his *Young Peoples Concerts* (CBS aired more than 50!). Sadly, the cost of licensing made lengthy footage cost-prohibitive and we see but 90-seconds of most performances in this 85-minute film. Though frustrating to watch, the film does reveal that there was classical music on TV long before *The Three Tenors* on PBS.

Let's head SOUTH - In prior columns I covered two CDs from what is called the "*Pa's Fiddle Project*" produced Tennessee musicologist Dale Cockrell to celebrate the American folk music includes in Laura Ingalls Wilder's series of *Little House on the Prairie* books. While those discs (plus one more not previously covered) were self-produced and marketed, the larger independent Compass Records label, jumped on the band wagon and, along with Cockrell and co-producer Joe Weed, produced a *Pa's Fiddle Concert* with well known country artists like Randy Travis and Ronnie Milsap that aired on PBS in June. That hour-long show -



with 14 songs - is now available on DVD with Cockrell providing aural "notes" as a bonus as well as a separate audio CD containing two extra performances. Compass has also selected tracks from the three prior CDs (featuring performers like The Riders in the Sky and Mac Wiseman) and issued still another CD, *The Pa's Fiddle Primer*. All the CDs contain liner notes. Both the CDs and the DVD contain well-done performances of American folk song standards.

Every year I look forward to the special *Music Issue* of *Southern Cultures*, the quarterly Journal from University of North Carolina Press. For at least the last few years, the 124-page issue has included an audio CD with some fascinating recordings, both commercial releases and archival recordings. This year's issue (published early in 2012 as "Winter 2011") contains a 22-track disc cleverly titled "Loving, Leaving, Liquor, and the Lord: Songs in the Southern Vernacular". Intrigued? You should be. The articles cover a variety of southern music styles including the blues, "redneck men and women", and even a young girl's 1956 encounter with Elvis! I wish there were more detailed notes on the CD tracks (besides the source), but there aren't. These issues are still well worth getting for the surprises you find on the CD. (www.southerncultures.org). The *West Virginia Music Hall of Fame* has, since 2008 (with the exception of 2010), inducted 8 or 9 music legends into the Hall with a two-hour ceremony broadcast on West Virginia Public Television. I've had the opportunity to see these shows, which feature brief bios, the award presentation and musical performances, and they are extremely well done. The variety of music styles is fascinating, from the expected "country" artists (Red Sovine in 2008, Hawkshaw Hawkins in 2009 and Kathy Mattea in 2011) to jazz legends like Don Redman (2009) and even polka king Frankie Yankovic (2008). There are blues and classical artists too. The WVHoF is now making DVDs of the show available by mail (\$12.00 plus \$2.00 shipping). You can read about the inductees, play the "virtual jukebox", and order the DVDs at: www.wvmusichalloffame.com



For the love of UKE! – Longtime readers of this column know my fascination with the simple four-string instrument, the ukulele, which shows up on early Edison cylinder records and on many hits of the 1920s. This summer brought, not one but, TWO well-researched books on the "jumping flea" along with a quirky, but fun, DVD. Ian Whitcomb, the transplanted (to Pasadena) Brit has been performing with his uke since the 1960s (when he had a pop hit with the song "Where Did Robinson Crusoe Go with Friday on Saturday Night?"). He's published a series of uke instruction books (which often contain a performance CD). His newest tome is for those of us who love the uke but have no coordination to play it. *Ukulele Heroes: The Golden Age* (Hal Leonard) is a highly illustrated 166-page paperback that profiles the musical performers

who made the instrument their trademark. After a brief history of how the uke came to Hawaii in the 1800s and found its way to US shores on both records and sheet music in the beginning of the 20th century, Whitcomb covers the "stars of the jazz age": Cliff Edwards, Frank Crumit and – new to me – May Singhi Breen (one of the rare female uke players other than L.A.'s Janet Klein – in whose band Whitcomb plays). Roy Smeck, who recorded for Edison in the early 1920s, has been moved – for some odd reason – to the later "Revival" section, which includes Lyle Ritz and the aforementioned Ms. Klein. In between there's a chapter on the Brits (George Formby Jr.) and another on Arthur Godfrey. And, not be left out, Witcomb has a chapter on his own fascinating life. This is really an attractive and fun to read book. The only thing that's missing this time is a CD with tracks by the "heroes"; I'm guessing that rights issues prevented this. As Whitcomb's book is for the eyes, another new book – *The Ukulele: A History* (Univ. of Hawaii Press) by Jim Tranquada is the mind. Lacking the flashy color graphics of the previous title (there are important illustrations but they are in grayscale) this 282-page paperback goes further back in history, and covers the manufacturers as well as the artists. You know this is a serious reference book when nearly 20% of the pages are the "notes", and another 18 pages are the "bibliography". Still, I found the book well written and there is a lot about early uke recordings. Each book is different. They complement, rather than compete with, each other. A new 74-minute film about uke fanatics has been making the rounds at film festivals. *Under The Boardwalk: A Ukulele Love Story* is primarily a history of the Ukulele Club of Santa Cruz that, with 2,000 members is the largest in the world. While there is a brief "history of the instrument" and a few excerpted live performances by both Witcomb and Jim Beloff, the film is more about their friendship and camaraderie among the Club's members. If you play the uke, you should find the uke club concept interesting. For more info, and to order from

the Director, go to www.ninakoocherfilms.com

A “variety” of highly recommended CDs – Each of the CDs in this section gets my “thumbs up” as being well produced and highly entertaining. Cindy Lovell, the Executive Director of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum in Hannibal, MO sure has some well-known (and generous!) friends. How else to explain how she was able to produce a two-CD set with new music performances by major country stars like Vince Gill, Brad Paisley, Sheryl Crow and Emmylou Harris (and others!) and an audio drama about Twain with a cast that includes Garrison Keillor as the Narrator, Jimmy Buffet as Huck Finn and – ready? – Clint Eastwood as Twain? You can read the connection that brought this project to fruition in the 40-page booklet with the complete text of the script (it involves both country music pioneers Jim & Jesse and Glen Campbell) and have a great time listening, while supporting the historic site with your purchase. (It’s only \$18.95 and not available in stores. Order at (www.marktwainmuseum.org). And lest you think I didn’t find an Edison connection here, in the August issue of *Smithsonian Magazine*, there was an article with a link to the only film footage of Twain, taken by Edison in 1909 at Twain’s Estate. This two-minute clip can be viewed at: <http://tinyurl.com/8f27c3q>. Staying with Edison for a minute, I just discovered a wonderful new CD by Ellis Paul (best known for his song “The World is Upside Down” from a 2000 Jim Carrey film). *The Hero in You (Black Wolf)* is aimed at kids but the songs are so well crafted that adults will love it too. Among the 13 “heroes” profiled are Woody Guthrie and Thomas Edison. The Edison track is actually a poem, not a song, and the only one without music. The enclosed booklet has all the words along with illustrations by the talented Paul. The British-based World Music label (available in the US) has been issuing a series of “Rough Guide to...” CDs for years and two recent ones caught my attention – and ear. *The Rough Guide to Bluegrass* contains 18 tracks from the “old guard” folks like Ralph Stanley to the “new folk” like The SteelDrivers. The booklet provides a basic background and short bios of the artists. *The Rough Guide to the music of New Orleans* covers the myriad of music styles from Trad to funk in 15 tracks. A real “gumbo”. Speaking of New Orleans trad jazz – there are some really fine new releases from the Preservation Hall Jazz Band as well as some live recordings from the annual Jazz Fest that I hope to have for you next time.

At the Philly Folk Fest in August one of the true discoveries for me was a young five-member band from Brooklyn that combines early jug band instrumentation with the brass section of New Orleans producing some great music. The band is called Roosevelt Dime and their new CD is titled *Steamboat Soul (self-released)*. The inside cover of the digipak even shows a cygnet horn phonograph. Head to their website (www.rooseveltdimemusic.bandcamp.com) and check them out. Great “old time” music is still being made. Speaking of “folk music”, in August I reviewed a Smithsonian two-CD package of a 1960 concert by Pete Seeger. This month a different two-CD set of a Seeger concert

recorded three years earlier – *Pete Seeger Live at Mandel Hall 1957 (Chrome Dreams)* – arrived. The concert was in Chicago at the time that Seeger couldn’t get bookings and includes a full night’s concert and part of a second night. The sound is excellent and the liner notes informative, yet even the author of the notes could not provide the original source of the recordings. There are no production details or credits on the package. But it will certainly appeal to Seeger fans (of which I am one.)

The folks at Archeophone just released a second volume of recordings by pioneer recording artist Eddie Morton – “*Bit of Broadway (The Sound of Vaudeville, Vol. 2)*” – with 27 sides recorded for U.S. Everlasting, Emerson, Victor and Columbia between 1911 and 1917. Morton was a “song plugger” and, according to *Variety*, introduced more hits than any other singer. Morton’s first self-composed song – “I Got You Steve” – certainly has a title dear to my heart! The packaging is the usual high quality from Archeophone with the 28-page booklet full of colorful illustrations, detailed track info and well-researched essays by Ryan Barna.

A fascinating new book on early media – A new book, *Music, Sound, and Technology in America (Duke Univ. Press)*, subtitled *A Documentary History of Early Phonograph, Cinema, and Radio* gathers what are termed “original source data” to provide a glimpse of how the press and advertising ephemera captured important moments in communications history. After an introductory essay, the 120 numbered “documents” are divided in three main sections: Sound Recording, Cinema, and Radio. The sound recording section fills nearly one-third of the 412-page paperbound book. Items like advertising brochures or sheet music are presented as text. Highlights (for me, you’ll find your own) include “The Phonograph Song” (1901) on page 52, a letter re: “Women and the phonograph” on page 70 and both a letter of complaint to the Edison Company (and the reply) from 1921 on page 60. The Radio section will also be of interest as it includes items relating to Jones & Hare and Vaughn DeLeath. I could go on listing other goodies here but there’s not enough room. A delightful read.

A Disney film for record collectors gets its first Bluray release – In August, Disney Home Video released the 1970 animated film *The Aristocats* on Bluray and it’s a delight. It not only features Maurice Chevalier singing the title song (he came out of retirement for this) but Scatman Crothers and Phil Harris swinging to the song “Everyone Wants to Be a Cat”. (Louis Armstrong was originally to have the Crothers role.). As a bonus, there is a deleted (and previously unheard) two-part opening song that was the “alternate opening” for the film. Thank you Disney!

Well, no more room this time. I’ll be back in December with my annual Holiday Wish List for gifting.

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