



ANYTHING Phonographic

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Late spring kept me busy traveling to Rochester, NY for the 46th Annual ARSC (Assoc. for Recorded Sound Collections) Conference (where both recorded collectors of all periods and genres mingle with major sound archives round-the-clock) and to the huge Book Expo America in New York City (when I discovered some important new books for the Fall that you'll be reading about here in future columns). At the ARSC Conference I was honored to host a session on music (and even phonographs) in early films, supplemented by an evening of rare jazz films by renowned film historian Mark Cantor. Next year's ARSC Conference is May 16-19 in Kansas City, MO; mark your calendar. Now on to this month's discoveries.

The Mikado in 52 minutes with "the one; the only – Groucho! – On the night of April 29, 1960 NBC presented an episode of the long-running *Bell Telephone Hour* featuring a new adaptation (by Gilbert & Sullivan authority and performer Martyn Green) of *The Mikado*, starring Groucho Marx (a huge G&S fan) as KoKo. Columbia Records released the soundtrack, but the video has never been available until now. VAI, which has issued *BTH* programs in the past, has supplemented the kinescope (a black and white one since no color copies are known to survive) with commentaries from Marx's daughter (also in the show), and Green's widow plus a medley of Green's performances from *HMS Pinafore* (in color!). Marx was 70 at the time (as was Met soprano Helen Traubel, who plays his foil) and this role was a dream come true for him. It will be for you too (whether you are a Marx Brothers or opera lover, or both). (www.vaimusic.com).

It's all about jazz - I've got a few new items for you this month that have had little exposure elsewhere. In 1971, just five months before he died, Louis Armstrong was presented with an award at the National Press Club in Washington. He brought along members of his band (including trombonist Tyree Glenn) and performed an impromptu mini-concert (as well as telling a somewhat-risque' story!). After his death, the NPC issued a very limited vinyl disc, which most fans have never heard. Smithsonian/Folkways, has paired the recording with a return visit to the NPC by Glenn and his band a year later, to create the CD *Red Beans and Rice-ly Yours*. While there are only four songs by "Satchmo" among

the 11 tracks, (and he continued to give his birth date incorrectly as July 4th), this is a must-have for jazz fans. In an odd move S/F chose to issue this CD as an on-demand product (as well as digital download) and it may not play in older CD players. As a bonus, the CD includes a .pdf file with brief notes as well as Armstrong's favorite recipes! It's available at: www.folkways.si.edu

Thanks to an alert from a friend I discovered **Remembering The Scranton Sirens**, a wonderful 57-minute documentary created for Northeastern Pennsylvania public TV station WVIA in 2011. Scranton was the third largest city in Pennsylvania in the 1920s and the Sirens were one of the "territory bands" roaming the country. Territory bands were not "big" bands but usually had nine or 10 members. The Sirens was founded in 1918 by violinist Billy Lustig and by 1921 the Dorsey Brothers and Russ Morgan had joined them – later to go out and form their own units. During its 10-year existence the Sirens included Jack Teagarden, Eddie Lang, Pee Wee Russell and Joe Venuti along with arranger Bill Challis, who cut his teeth here. The film is narrated by Leon Redbone and features interviews with Jazz Master Dan Morgenstern and Challis' son. Finally this over-looked band gets its day. As a bonus, the DVD comes packed with four-track audio CD featuring four new performances by Vince Giordano and The Nighthawks. Proceeds from the DVD support the PBS station and it is available exclusively at www.shop.wvia.org

Fire up the Barbeque and put on this new CD – It's been a few years since I received any releases from Old Hat Records, one of my favorite reissue labels and I wasn't sure they were still in business. but an email to label owner Marshall Wyatt proved me dead wrong and a recent title (and one I missed from 2009) has been in my player a lot lately. The newer release – *Barbeque Any Old Time* is subtitled *Blues from the Pit 1927-1942* and contains a whopping 27 (dare I say it?) "tasty" sides with BBQ as their theme. Most of the artists are not household names (unless you are a major blues collector) though Memphis Minnie and Brownie McGhee are fairly well known. You may not know singer Georgia White but that's the legendary Les Paul making his recording debut (at age 20) backing White on "Pigmeat Blues. The records come from Victor, Vocalion, Gennett and smaller labels and the transfers – by Christopher King – are excellent. Bo Carter's double-entendre (one of a few here)

“Pig Meat Is What I Crave” is from an unissued pressing. Wyatt also produces some the most visually stunning packages and this one is no different, with a 20-page booklet of notes and complete source data. With titles like “Pork Chop Blues”, “Pigs’ Feet and Slaw” and “Who Did You Give My Barbeque To?” (Parts 1 and 2), you’ll be hungry before the album ends! The other OH release is *Gastonia Gallop* and is just as graphically gorgeous. Its subtitles, *Cotton Mill Songs & Hillbilly Blues* and *Piedmont Textile Workers on Record, Gaston County, NC 1927-1931*, pretty much describe the 24 tracks here. Gastonia was the center of the NC textile industry and things were tough during this period. So there are songs about the economics of the time and working in the factory. None of the performers will be familiar to you but these folks were talented. Unlike the BBQ album, sound engineer King had to work with some pretty worn discs on labels like Paramount and some of these recordings are what can best be described as “rough”. The 24-page full-color booklet is just as gorgeous as other OH releases. (Would I expect anything less from Wyatt?) www.oldhatrecords.com

Pickin’ Time - Though the banjo, as an instrument, emigrated from Africa, the five-string folk music instrument we hear today was developed in America. The story of “America’s Instrument” is entertainingly told in the 84-minute documentary *Give Me The Banjo* that aired earlier this year on many PBS television stations and was recently released on DVD by Docurama. Narrated by comedian/actor/author Steve Martin (who earned a Grammy last year for his banjo CD), the film does a good a job in covering the musical history of the instrument from Civil War days through Minstrel shows (there’s a chapter titled *Minstrel Mania*), vaudeville (Eddie Peabody, Fred Van Eps), country (Gus Cannon, Charlie Poole), folk (Pete Seeger) and bluegrass (Earl Scruggs) to the 21st century pickers like Bela Fleck. The Charlie Poole section will be of great interest to many of my readers because Kinny Rorer (great-nephew of Poole’s fiddle player, Posey Rorer) is a phono collector and is interviewed standing among his large collection of antique horn phonographs. If you saw the film on PBS, you might still want the DVD. There are 30 minutes of bonus features including an 11-minute mini-doc on Uncle Dave Macon, a great Eddie Peabody short, a feature on jazz banjo and more. Available at most video outlets. Folk singer Pete Seeger is most identified with the banjo. Seeger fans will want to know about a recently discovered 1960 Seeger concert – recorded a small college in Maine – that Smithsonian Folkways has released (in a commercially produced album; not like the Satchmo one) as *The Complete Bowdoin College Concert*. The two-disc set (complete with 20 pages of notes) includes the full two-hour concert with some songs that Seeger never recorded elsewhere. A wonderful presentation at the ARSC Conference given by Will Chase, sound archivist for the Florida Folklife Program, revealed the amazing archive of live “folk” performances held in their archive. Performers are both well known (Doc Watson, Bill Monroe) and under-known. The FFP has compiled five CD compilations that can be streamed at their website: <http://floridamemory.com/audio>. Check them out!

I’ll get this right yet! – I’m not sure how I screwed up again,

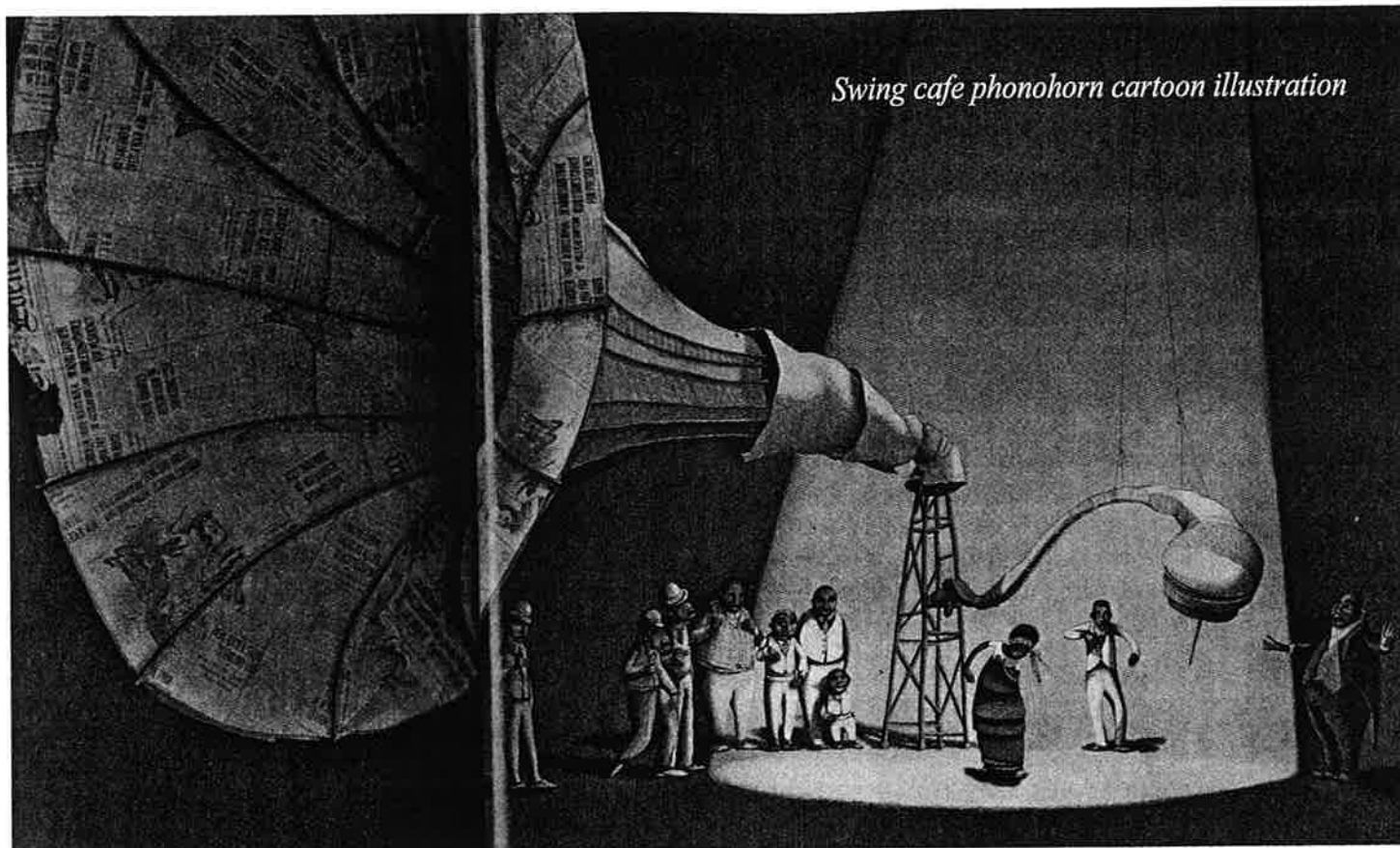
but last time I still gave you the wrong URL for the terrific “tap dance on film” DVD. It should have read: www.dancetimepublications.com



Charlie Poole, Posey Rorer and Norman Woodlieff made up the trio band called “North Carolina Ramblers”

A “children’s” book on swing and jazz that I can recommend to adults – Regular readers know that I often discover books for children that you can use to introduce them (whether your children or grandchildren) to the old records we love. I recently discovered a series of books, each with a CD, from a publisher in Toronto, Canada, but available in the US. The Secret Mountain uses the slogan *Stories and Music for All Eyes and Ears!*, and the title *Swing Café* is just that. The 54-page hardbound book tells the story of a Brazilian cricket (yes, you read that right!) who dreams of singing jazz in a New York nightclub. She stows away in a women’s fruit hat (yep!) and heads for NYC, where she meets a fly (!) named Buster who takes her to East 54th St where her dream comes true. The gorgeous (and detailed) illustrations by Rebecca Dautremer incorporate images of Ellington, Calloway and other jazz themes (including the stylized horn gramophone I’ve included as a graphic this month). And the sleeve in the back of the book contains a 12-track CD with recordings by a diverse group of artists including Ellington, Fats Waller, The Mills Brothers, Vess L. Osman and Carmen Miranda (remember Zaz is from Brazil). With a list price the same as a standard CD; this one’s a steal. It should be in most bookstores but check out www.thesecondmountain.com for other great books with CDs you can share with your kids I hope to cover more here in the future.

Odds and Ends – Here is an array of things I just couldn’t quite categorize but wanted to share. 2012 marks the 100th anniversary of singer/songwriter (long before that catchphrase was created) Woody Guthrie’s birth and there are lots of projects being planned (some haven’t been issued yet, as I write this column). One of the first out of the gate is the book *This Land Is Your Land* (Running Press) by Robert Santelli. This 254-page volume is subtitled *Woody Guthrie and the Journey of an American Folksong* and, in addition to describing Guthrie’s life, focuses on the song that was originally



Swing cafe phonohorn cartoon illustration

titled “God Blessed America” before he changed it to the song that many feel (along with Berlin’s “God Bless America”) should be our national anthem. Nearly all text, with a few photos (the one on page 18 shows the original handwritten lyrics, including the rarely heard 4th, 5th and 6th verses), the book covers more than just Guthrie’s life. Chapter 2 is devoted to Irving Berlin. This is as much a personal journey for Santelli (former Director of the Experience Music Project and now Director of the Grammy Museum) as it is a bio of Guthrie. Many collectors know Michael Tilson-Thomas as the former conductor and Musical Director of the San Francisco Symphony (and prior to that as Associate Conductor for the Boston Symphony). But M T-T’s musical heritage goes back to his grandparents, Boris and Bessie Thomashefsky, renowned performers in the American Yiddish Musical Theater of the early 20th Century. (M T-T’s father, Ted, changed the family name.) Though Boris and Bessie died too early to make recordings, their grandson created a “concert play” to tell their story. That show – *The Thomashefskys* – narrated by the conductor, with a talented cast of singers was performed with backing by Miami’s New World Symphony (where M T-T is now Director) was recorded and aired on PBS this year. That show, with substantial bonus material, has been released on DVD by Docurama. Anyone interested in Jewish music will want to seek out this title.

A British reissue label new to me – Rhythm and Blues Records – but distributed in the US - has released two double-CD albums under the umbrella title *The History of New Orleans Rhythm & Blues: Jazz, Blues & Creole Roots*. The first volume,

covering 1921 to 1947 includes 51 tracks by everyone from Louis Armstrong to Bob Crosby’s Bobcats, with blues by Lonnie Johnson and Memphis Minnie mixed in. (Yes, Minnie was born in New Orleans!). A lot of lesser knowns (at least to me) are here too. Volume 2 overlaps a bit on the years (1947-53) and has more of the later artists like Lloyd Price and Professor Longhair. Both come with 28-page booklets jammed with detailed track notes and photos. A highly entertaining and music history course in a jewel box.

Up last is a new import from Germany. The “Cadillac” of self-playing pianos (actually called reproducing pianos) was the Welte Mignon, which used a separate unit to play the perforated paper rolls and was attached to a normal grand piano. The company was able to have composers “cut” performances of their own work. Most of these “rolls” were by classical composers but a few were by “popular” ones. *Swinging Welte (Tacet)* compiles 18 of these rare “pop and jazz” performances on a single CD, including two by George Gershwin (of his own compositions) and one played by Frank Banta (the studio pianist for Victor) of Walter Donaldson’s “Sam, The Old Accordion Man”. There are performances of songs by Berlin, Youmans and Romberg as well (though performed by pianists whose names are not familiar to me.). The 32-page booklet of liner notes (in both English and German) by well-known record collector Rainer Lotz, provide the background and history of the original rolls.

Well, that’s all for this month. More to come next time.. *Fin*