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The Victor Red Seal Discography, Volume II: Double-Sided Series to 1930 , and: The Victor Black Label Discography: 16000–17000 Series , and: The Victor Black Label Discography: 18000–19000 Series , and: The Victor Discography: Green, Blue and Purple Labels , and: The Edison Discography (1926–1929) (review)



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posed right at the outset in the Tokita-Hughes introductory chapter.

This is a research companion that works very well indeed, if one works hard with it; it is a book for poring over, both with regard to its texts and its music examples; and it rewards reading across its various chapters. It is an articulate, forward-looking companion demanding interaction, but assuming a certain amount of self-reliance in its partner. It goes without saying that it is clearly essential for graduates in the field, and accordingly for graduate library collec-

tions; but with the considerable lean towards the survey in many of its essays, it would be well placed too in undergraduate collections supporting performing-arts-orientated Asian Studies programs, and in collections supporting (ethno)musicology programs with a focus on East Asia. A most welcome new friend!

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The Victor Black Label Discography: 16000–17000 Series. By John R. Bolig. Highlands Ranch, CO: Mainspring Press, 2007. [xxvi, 444 p. ISBN 9780977273577. \$79.] Indexes.

The Victor Black Label Discography: 18000–19000 Series. By John R. Bolig. Highlands Ranch, CO: Mainspring Press, 2008. [xxvi, 411 p. ISBN 9780977273591. \$79.] Indexes.

The Victor Discography: Green, Blue and Purple Labels. By John R. Bolig. Highlands Ranch, CO: Mainspring Press, 2006. [xv, 252 p. ISBN 0977272520. \$55.] Indexes.

The Edison Discography (1926–1929). By Raymond R. Wile. Highlands Ranch, CO: Mainspring Press, 2008. [xxvii, 442 p. ISBN 978-0-9772735-8-4. \$79.] Indexes.

Veteran discographer John R. Bolig continues his series covering the early years of the Victor Talking Machine Company with four additional volumes. *The Victor Red Seal Discography, Volume I* covered single-sided discs issued by Victor between 1903 and 1925 (reviewed in *Notes* 62, no. 2 [December 2005]: 407–10). 1923 was an important year for the Red Seal label. Although Victor had begun issuing double-sided records as early as 1908, such releases were confined to the lower-priced labels, beginning with the ubiquitous Black Label discs, which consisted almost entirely of various types of popular and ethnic music. Releases on the prestigious Red Seal label, which were reserved for Victor's premiere classical artists,

continued to be issued only in single-faced format until 1923. The single-sided record had no technical advantages—this was partly snob appeal on Victor's part though, as Bolig points out, royalty agreements with celebrity artists also played a role in adhering to single-faced records.

Bolig's introduction covers the transition to electrical recording, double-sided records and Eldridge Johnson's sale of The Victor Talking Machine Company to a group of investment bankers who, within two years, sold the company to RCA. In 1923 Victor finally succumbed and began issuing double-sided Red Seal records, including reissues of much of their existing single-faced catalog. For two years, Red Seal

records were released in both formats, as single-faced discs bearing the old five-digit catalog numbers, and as double-faced discs bearing three or four-digit numbers (there were also a handful of reissues in the 10,000 series). By 1925, with the arrival of electrical recording, the single-sided record disappeared for good. Bolig's introduction also covers his methods for compiling the discographic information, especially his exhaustive research in the Sony/BMG Archive; terminology used in the book; and an explanation of the various markings found on the records.

Bolig's second Red Seal discography covers the first seven years of double-sided releases, from 1923 until 1930. Like its predecessor, this volume follows a strict numerical sequence by catalog number for the listings. Each entry also gives the title, composer, artist(s), recording date and location, matrix and take number, and release date. If a record had also been issued in single-faced format by Victor, the single-faced catalog number is given. British and German releases are listed where known, though Bolig admits that identifying all foreign catalog numbers is a work in progress. Victor releases from foreign masters are also included; these comprised a significant portion of its catalog. Victor's matrix numbers always begin with a letter prefix, "B" for 10-inch sides and "C" for 12-inch. Electrical recordings are easy to identify, since the prefix is followed by "VE."

Bolig devotes section II of the book to "Records Released as Sets in Albums," which is dominated by the Musical Masterpiece series. One group of albums he does not list in this section is the Music Arts Library, a short-lived series of complete classical works predating the Musical Masterpiece albums, though he mentions the Music Arts Library in the introduction. Unlike the Musical Masterpiece series, Victor did not assign numbers to the Music Arts Library albums; only the individual discs bore catalog numbers, many of which could also be purchased individually. All of the individual catalog numbers in this series are listed by Bolig in Section I of the discography.

One album that has given researchers considerable trouble is the first electrical recording of Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 ("New World"), recorded by Leopold

Stokowski and a reduced Philadelphia Orchestra between May and October of 1925. The recording was made in the Trinity Church Studio in Camden, NJ, and the records bear catalog numbers 6565 through 6569. Like all of Victor's early electrical recordings, the discs had acoustic-style "batwing" labels—only the letters "VE" in the run-out space identified the recording as being electrical. The individual records were bundled into an unnumbered Music Arts Library album. Victor remade the recording in October 1927 with the full Philadelphia Orchestra in their regular venue, the Academy of Music. These discs were issued with "scroll" Orthophonic labels and issued as album M-1 in the Musical Masterpiece series. The individual records were assigned the same catalog numbers as the 1925 version, a common Victor practice for remakes. In addition to the 1927 remake, Bolig lists the 1925 original under "Album 1" in the Musical Masterpiece series, which is not correct (pp. 485–86). Michael Sherman made the same error, identifying a label scan from the 1925 set as being from album M-1 (Michael W. Sherman, *The Collector's Guide to Victor Records* [Dallas Texas: Monarch Record Enterprises, 1992], 112). The two-page section III is devoted to the American Speech Series. Bolig has included three indexes, by title, artist, and a coupling index by catalog number.

The Victor Black Label Discographies encompass four 5-digit series of catalog numbers beginning with the first double-faced releases in 1908 and ending with recordings sessions in March 1926, early in the electrical era. All records in these series are 10-inch discs. The discographic entries cover the same categories of information as those in the Red Seal discographies, with one exception. In the Black Label listings Bolig provides both the release date and the date of withdrawal (the Red Seal listings do not give catalog withdrawal dates). As Bolig points out, the artists whose work appeared on the Black Label are today normally lumped into the broad category of "popular" music. That term hardly begins to describe the diversity of material that appeared on this label during this time, including contemporary popular songs, religious music, dance music, old favorites, patriotic songs, spoken records by politi-

cians and comedians, Broadway selections, and educational records. The artists on Victor's roster included vocalists, instrumentalists of all varieties, concert bands, military bands, dance bands, studio orchestras, small vocal ensembles, choirs, and the like.

Once again, Bolig provides useful and well-researched background information in his introduction. The volume covering the 16000 and 17000 series contains some historical background on the developments and decisions leading up to the introduction of the double-sided record, which was initially opposed by Victor and its owner/founder Eldridge Johnson. Once Columbia, Victor's major competitor in the flat-disc market, adopted the format, Victor had little choice but to follow. Bolig also discusses the relationships between Victor and its Canadian and overseas affiliates, locations where Victor recordings were made, the acoustic recording process, and identification of multiple versions of the same selection by the same artists. One statement is likely to provoke disagreement from musicians who are collectors: "Because professional performers were able to repeat a selection with almost no noticeable differences, it is rarely worth listening to records made during this period to determine if it is a different take" (p. xix). Collectors thrive on identifying alternate takes of the same recording, and astute listeners can invariably find something to distinguish multiple versions from one another.

In the introduction to the 18000 and 19000 series, Bolig discusses the public's changing musical tastes as World War I drew to an end. Band records and vocal quartets were losing ground to dance records, and jazz was on the rise. Before the war, black artists were a rarity in the Victor catalogs, and white "country" performers were almost non-existent. As important sound recording patents expired, new record companies sprang up to fill these voids, and Victor had no choice but to broaden their offerings in order to remain competitive. Bolig also covers the transition to electrical recording, and the various markings found on Victor records, duplicating some of the material in Volume II of the Red Seal discography, but also adding information pertinent to the music and artists that appeared on the Black Label. Bolig

makes an important point about the "78-rpm" record. Even though Victor catalogs stated that their records should be played at this speed, very few of them were actually made at 78 rpm. Most Victor acoustics reproduce properly at 75.00 or 76.6 rpm and early electrics are often just under the nominal speed, between 77.0 and 77.5. Victor simply wasn't able to measure their recording speeds with the kind of precision necessary for precise pitching of their records, which is why most of their acoustic phonographs were equipped with speed controls.

The Victor Discography: Green, Blue and Purple Labels covers an interesting and important part of the company's catalog. Victor introduced the Purple Label in 1910 as a mid-priced series, featuring artists deemed of greater stature than those found on the low-priced Black Label, but not of sufficient artistic merit to warrant their placement on Red Seal records. The first Victor Purple Label release featured the Scottish entertainer Harry Lauder. Many releases included lighter classical fare with a Victor house orchestra conducted by Victor Herbert, as well as operatic selections and ensembles by house artists, including soprano Lucy Isabelle Marsh, tenor Lambert Murphy, and baritone Reinald Werrenrath (many of these artists had previously appeared on the Black Label). A number of Broadway performers also appeared on this label. All Purple Label records were single-faced, but Victor also introduced the Blue Label in 1910 for double-faced releases of much of the same material. During its final years, Victor issued several significant classical recordings from European masters on the Blue Label. The Purple label was abandoned in 1920, but the double-faced Blue Series survived into the beginning of electrical recording, finally disappearing in 1926. At that point, a few of the most important Blue Label artists were placed on Red Seal, including Lauder (now Sir Harry), Marsh, Murphy, and Werrenrath. The Green Label was a double-faced educational series of limited scope, with fewer than 70 released records between 1917 and 1929.

Some of Victor's decisions regarding the placement of important classical artists on the Blue Label are odd. Jacques Urlus was the most important Wagner tenor at the Metropolitan Opera between 1913 and

1917, having sung 130 performances with the company during that time. As a tenor admired by many of his contemporary artists, including Enrico Caruso, one would have thought him worthy of Red Seal status. Yet his only Victor record—excerpts from Halévy's *La juive* and Verdi's *Otello*—was issued on the Blue Label (Victor 55038, recorded 1 September 1911 in Berlin and issued by Victor in 1914 under license from The Gramophone Company).

As with the other volumes, Bolig's introduction provides extremely useful background information on these labels. I found a couple of discrepancies between Bolig's listings and my own copies of some of the Blue Label discs, specifically in the excerpts from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* recorded by The Gramophone Company between 1920 and 1923, and issued by Victor in 1924. On Victor 55204-B, "Sieg-mund sees the sword hilt in the tree" and 55206B, "Wotan warns Brünnhilde not to disobey," both from *Die Walküre*, the Victor label identifies the conductor as Eugene Goossens, yet Bolig credits these sides to Albert Coates. Christopher Dymant does not list these sides in his Coates discography, so the Victor record labels are probably correct (Christopher Dymant, "Albert Coates Discography," in *Recorded Sound*, nos. 57–58 [January & April 1975]: 386–405).

In his introduction to the first Black Label discography, Bolig mentions the Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings Project being carried out at the University of California, Santa Barbara under the direction of David Seubert and Sam Brylawski. This project is intended to complete the unfinished work of the late William R. Moran and Ted Fagan, whose two Victor discographies end at 1907 (Ted Fagan and Wm. R. Moran, *The Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings: Pre-Matrix Series—12 January 1900 to 23 April 1903* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983]; and *The Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings: Matrix Series—1 through 4999, 23 April 1903 to 7 January 1908* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986]). As of this writing the entire series of Victor matrix numbers through 31 December 1920 are available for online browsing and searching (<http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/> [accessed 18 November 2009]). Following Moran and Fagan, Seubert and Brylawski's listing by matrix number includes all unpublished

recordings, including those that were not assigned catalog numbers, which Bolig does not. Bolig, on the other hand, lists all Victor releases made from European masters, an extremely important part of the domestic Victor catalog. These exhaustive research projects are complementary rather than competitive. Bolig's printed volumes are significant contributions to discographic research, and will prove invaluable to sound archives, researchers, and serious collectors.

Raymond R. Wile is arguably the world's leading expert on the history of Edison's involvement in sound recording, and of the Edison record catalog in both cylinder and disc formats. Over the past thirty years Wile has presented numerous papers on this subject at Association for Recorded Sound Collections annual conferences, and has authored a series of invaluable articles in the *ARSC Journal*. Among his most important publications is the two-volume discography of the entire Edison Diamond Disc catalog (Raymond Wile, *Edison Disc Recordings* [Philadelphia: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1978]).

The Edison Discography documents the last four years of Edison's phonograph business. Wile's generously illustrated introduction gives an excellent overview of the problems facing Edison in 1926, and the company's various attempts to save itself. Electrical recording had been introduced the year before, and by 1926 most record companies had converted. But Edison stubbornly opposed the electrical recording process because, in his view, "They cannot record without distortion" (p. vii). His company was the only cylinder manufacturer left, yet sales of Blue Amberol cylinders and phonographs had dwindled to practically nothing. The Edison Diamond Discs, in addition to being acoustically recorded, were vertically cut, making them incompatible with nearly every other disc phonograph (and, conversely, Edison's Diamond Disc phonograph was incompatible with nearly every other type of record). Despite Edison's continued objections, the company began experimenting with electrical recording in 1927, and also began lateral experiments that same year (Edison called his laterals "Needle Type Electric" records). It wasn't until 1929 that Edison was actually able to get laterally cut records on the market, however, and by then it was too late. In

the fall of 1929 he closed his record and phonograph business for good.

For his discography, Wile has opted for a chronological listing by recording date. Each entry contains matrix number, take (Edison used letters), artist(s), title of the side along with composer and authors of the lyrics (if any), plus catalog numbers of the releases. Diamond Disc catalog numbers are followed by "L" or "R" to indicate the left or right side of a record (Edison's rather odd way of indicating sides 1 and 2). Many records were issued in multiple formats, so Wile has used the prefix "DD" for Diamond Disc, "BA" for Blue Amberol cylinder, "LP" for Long Playing, "NT" for Needle Type, and "SR" for Sample Record. Sample Records were 12-inch, dubbed, vertically-cut discs for dealer use. Wile lists all unpublished recordings, many of which have survived. "Test" is used to indicate a test pressing still held by the Edison National Historical Site and "MM" is used to indicate if a metal matrix still exists. All Edison disc records were double-faced, and Wile also includes the date when the "Music Room Committee" decided on the coupling for the opposite side.

Blue Amberol cylinders were generally dubbed from vertically-cut Diamond Disc masters, and Wile indicates the cylinder master number along with the take of the disc master used for the dubbing. Once electrical recording began, the Edison Company frequently made simultaneous vertical and lateral disc masters on separate cutters, split from the same microphone feed. In these cases, the lateral matrix number can be identified by the prefix "N" used by Edison to indicate a Needle-Type matrix.

The discography is organized into chapters for each of the four years, plus additional chapters covering the Columbia Street (West Orange, NJ) Matrix Series, Long Playing Records, and the Slogan Reproducing Machine Records. The Columbia Street masters consisted primarily of Edison's monthly advertising records, each 12-inch disc containing a brief fragment of each of the new releases for that month. The series was short-lived, ending in February, 1927. Edison introduced a fine-grooved, Long Playing record in 1926, with a record/play time of twenty-four minutes for a 10-inch disc and forty minutes for the 12-inch discs. The Edison LPs were

prone to skipping and the format was discontinued after about two years.

Experimental recordings are listed in an appendix, nearly all of which are 10-inch, acoustically recorded masters; some are standard Diamond Discs and others are in Long Playing format. Wile uses some terminology which may be confusing. The "groove pitch" of a disc or cylinder is the number of lines per inch (LPI), alternately referred to as "threads per inch" (TPI), on the record surface (the higher the number, the longer the record/play time). Wile refers to this specification as "turns per inch." He also says that the standard for Diamond Discs was 300; it was actually 150 (see Tom Owen, "A Technical and Historical Look at the Stylus/Groove Interface in Recording Past to Present" [presented at the 74th Audio Engineering Society convention, 8–12 October 1983, AES Preprint 2048]).

Wile provides four indexes, by title, artist, accompanist, and vocal chorus, the last being an index of vocalists and speakers on instrumental recordings, when they are documented in the Edison files. Each entry in the index is followed by the matrix number(s) associated with that entry. I found at least one discrepancy in the artist index. Under "Martinelli, Giovanni" the first matrix number is 12053, an Edison LP. However, 12053 contains excerpts from Verdi's *Aida* with tenor Giovanni Zenatello, not Martinelli. Such problems are minor and rare. Wile's reputation for methodical, painstaking research is continually in evidence in this discography. *The Edison Discography 1926–1929* is an important volume which will prove invaluable to researchers, institutions, and collectors.

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An Annotated Index to Selected Articles from *The Musical Courier*, 1880–1940. By Peter H. Adams. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009. [2 vols. (x, 1611 p.) ISBN 9780810866584. \$225.] Indexes.

The Musical Courier, which began publication in 1880 as *The Musical and Sewing Machine Gazette* and appeared weekly for most of its life until its demise in 1962, was one of the most widely read music journals