

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CYLINDER PHONOGRAPH

George List

(Continued from the last issue)

The cylinder phonograph was supreme for a rather short period. The gramophone, or disk player, was developed by Emil Berliner in the 1880's and came into full scale production with the introduction of shellac records in 1897. (The term phonograph was originally applied to one of the two competing makes of cylinder players manufactured in the United States. The term gramophone was originally applied to disk players only. As time passed the term phonograph was indiscriminately applied in the United States to both types of reproducers. In Great Britain the term gramophone was retained for disk players.)

The spring wound gramophone had many advantages not possessed by the cylinder player. The fidelity of reproduction was superior and the playing time longer, especially as it became practicable to play the disk on both sides. Mass reproduction of disks from a master was easier and more economical than similar reproduction of cylinders. The disk player rapidly outstripped the cylinder player in popularity. In competition Edison introduced plastic commercial cylinders of higher fidelity and finally, in 1908, the Blue Amberola microgroove commercial cylinder which played for four minutes. But the tide towards the disk player soon engulfed the cylinder player. Pathé abandoned cylinders in favor of disks around 1910. Columbia followed suit in 1912 and Edison in 1913. At this time there were an estimated million cylinder phonographs extant.

Although the use of disk playbacks was widespread by the turn of the century, the use of disk recording apparatus was generally confined to recording studios. Economical portable disk recorders were not available until the late 1930's. The manufacture of cylinder machines for office dictating use was continued by Dictaphone and by Edison. The cylinders were enlarged and lengthened to permit a playing time of approximately four minutes. These machines were now driven electrically. Although some recordings were made by ethnologists with these dictating machines they were not in too great favor due to their bulk and to the necessity of having an electrical power supply available. Although no longer in favor with the general public, ethnologists and other individuals collecting in remote areas continued until the late 1930's to depend upon the spring-wound cylinder phonograph. In 1936, for example, George Herzog (Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States, American Council of Learned Societies, Bulletin No. 24, April, 1936, p. 14) wrote as follows:

The advantage of wax cylinders is that the machines are very light and simple to operate. They have been eminently useful in the



Recording Ovimbundu drummers by cylinder phonograph in 1929. Reproduced from The Ovimbundu of Angola by Wilfred D. Hambly, Field Museum of Natural History, Publication 329, 1934.

past, and should remain equally useful for taking advantage of opportunities afforded by expeditions the main objective of which is not the recording of music and which cannot afford to purchase or carry bulky equipment.

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OHIO FOLKLORE ARCHIVE (cont.)

the archive number of the Archive of Ohio Folklore.

Purchases of books and recordings for the archive are generally made from the Miami University Library budget, though some generous gifts have been received. Purchase of recording equipment (one Ampex and one Pentron portable) and of tape has been made possible through university research funds. One regular part-time assistant for the archive is included in the Miami University budget, and on application the archive has three times secured assignment of graduate research assistants.

The archive is housed in generous space in two rooms of the new wing of the Library; study tables are provided near the books and periodicals in the Special Collections Room, and the Audio Reference Room provides space for recordings, all equipment, and record and tape playback either in a small booth or in a classroom. The classroom may quickly be converted into a recording studio.

The Archive does, with some limitation, supply exchange and reference service, although such service is always an overtime job for its director.

The future of the Archive is hopeful: the collections are not an accumulation of material that only one person can use, and they form a good basis for development in whatever ways future needs direct.