

An Ode to Early Record Catalogues

Thomas Henry is a collector of 78 rpm records based in Paris who has carried out extensive research on the history of sound recording through his blog [Ceints de Bakélite](#) and his interactive mapping project [Disquaires de Paris](#). With a background in history and sociology of music from Paris École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, he is originally a vinyl collector who converted to shellac a decade ago after finding a bunch of mysterious Armenian 78 rpm records at Yerevan's flea market.

A member of [Paris Phono Museum](#), he also holds the Vice-Chair position of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives' (IASA) discography committee. One of the aims of the committee is to create a network of partners who will collaboratively create a bibliography of discographies including information about all current, out-of-print and in progress discographies published worldwide in print and electronic formats. Digital versions of discographies, including those which have thus far only been available in print, will also be made available through this bibliography. You can access it and add to it through [IASA's webpage](#).

A discography is a comprehensive and detailed compilation of musical recordings, particularly those of a particular performer or composer. It is also very common to find discographies dedicated to a music style or a label. Behind a discography, there is the will to provide more information about a body of sound recordings. Discographies are often created by a researcher, a collector or an institution. Some of them are printed and published, some of them are just excel sheets on the computer of private collectors, but all of them are created with the same purpose: increasing knowledge about an artist or an orchestra, a composer, a label, a music style, etc. Record catalogues, key sources for this type of research, are printed documents produced by record companies that can be used as valuable tools by discographers and music aficionados. They offer less information than a discography about the sound recordings, but are full of interesting elements that complement and enhance them.

For this blog post, Henry takes a closer look at some of the record catalogues made available online by the British Library and through their rich visual iconography, illustrates their use and history. Thomas Henry would like to thank Jonathan Ward and Suresh Chandvankar for their assistance in writing this piece.

An ode to early record catalogues

While listening to a fox-trot from the mid 1920's, a Beethoven sonata from the 1930's or a calypso from the early 50's, one might want to learn more about it. Of course some information will be available on the record's centre label but this information can be quite limited or not directly comprehensible. The name of a performer or an orchestra, title of a song, name and logo of a record company, short description ("fox-trot", "piano solo", "tenor with orchestra", "birds imitation" etc...), language and some

obscure figures and letters can still lead us to wonder – When was this recorded? Who is the singer? What did he/she look like? Was he/she famous? What were people listening to at the time? And how did they listen to their records?

Finding answers to all these questions might take time or even turn into a lifelong quest for some obsessive researchers. Such research can be somewhat akin to detective work and clues can be found browsing photograph, newspaper, poster or sheet music collections available in libraries. Another fascinating, often underrated but incredibly useful item in this research is the record catalogue. 175 record catalogues have been digitized and made available on the [British Library website](#). They are focussed on the British market and cover the "acoustic era" – from the late 19th century to the mid 1920's – before the microphone's invention. One might see these catalogues as just a simple listing of records, but they are actually much more than that and in this post, I'll try to show why.



New His Master's Voice Operatic Records,
1925

From the very beginning of the phonographic industry, all recording companies published catalogues listing their published output: wax cylinders and later on, records. In most cases, "general catalogues" were published every year and these were sometimes completed by "supplements", published on a monthly basis. In addition, some extra catalogues were also published for specific repertoires or special occasions. Created for a commercial use, these catalogues firstly give an overview of a record company's output at a given moment in time and illustrate how this output was categorised and marketed. Indications on the label's colours assigned to each musical style and its corresponding price range give us a clear picture of what it was like buying records in the past.



Zonophone Record Catalogue,
1913-14

The very first catalogues from the late 1890's rarely mention the name of performers and composers; potential buyers were more interested in the name of a popular melody or an opera. Their content gets more precise over time and later catalogues, provide much more detail.



Edison-Bell List of Records,
1898

These catalogues do not just consist of a monotone alphabetically ordered list of artists, they let us discover a very rich iconography – photographs, drawings, advertisements – complementary to the sounds themselves.



His Master's Voice New Records, September
1913

Beyond their aesthetic dimension, these graphic elements provide interesting information on the ways in which records and talking machines have been used over time. In addition, they often include technical tips on the best ways to play and store records, information that can be useful for people interested in the history of sound recordings and talking machines.



Complete Catalogue of Pathe
Standards 10 Inch Double Sided
Discs, 1911

These catalogues are also full of photographs and biographical elements about artists that can be hard to find anywhere else. They reflect consumers' tastes of the time, showing what the hits and who the big stars of the early 20th century were. This gives us some clues about the music our ancestors were listening to. No talking machine nor record collection from that time has survived in my family, so I can only speculate: were my great-grandparents fans of the French soprano Emma Calvé or the baritone Maurice Renaud?



Catalogue of "Red Label" Gramophone
Records, February 1904

Or were they listening to marches by La Garde Républicaine and comic monologues by Parisian "Café-Concert" artists? Or were they actually lovers of rare or upbeat – yet popular – repertoires, such as animal imitations, whistling or hunting horn recordings?



New Gramophone Records, August 1910

At a time where phonographs and gramophones were still considered by many as amusing curiosities rather than a way to enjoy "serious" music, convincing famous artists to make recordings was also a way for record companies to legitimize the talking machine. From very early on, The Gramophone Company understood that and some of its older catalogues feature pages where some popular singers express their admiration for the Gramophone and its capacity to faithfully reproduce their voice.



His Master's Voice Celebrity Records, 1915

In the same vein, record companies also used their catalogues to promote some of their "sensational" or unusual recordings and demonstrate the superiority of their products. Lacking Lolcats at the time, lambs and dogs were preferred to create a buzz.



His Master's Voice New Records,
September 1913

As an object, each of these catalogues has its own history. If you look at

them carefully, you'll see that they have many stories to tell about their former owners and the period during which they were published. They might include personal hand-written notes by their former owners or references to the historical and political background, as illustrated by the following reference to the Russo-Japanese War.



Catalogue of Twelve-inch Gramophone Monarch Records,
March 1904

□ Early recordings made in some regions of the world are less documented than those made in Western countries. In some cases, there is no longer an existing archive allowing us to discover more about an artist and the context in which he or she was recorded. For these types of records, the work of discographers becomes absolutely essential. Based on a systematic inventorisation and analysis of cylinder and record details – performers, title, language, label, genre, matrix and catalogue numbers – discographical research provides valuable elements to find out the date and the result of a recording session. Record catalogues are a key resource for discographers, as they feature dating and background information. Browsing these catalogues is often the first step in discographical research, even though some of them are very rare – in some cases much rarer than records themselves! The opposite also holds true: records listed in some catalogues might never turn up and their presence in a catalogue remains the only evidence that they ever existed.

As a collector of 78 rpm records “from around the world” – some might call them “world music” or “ethnic” records – I cannot conclude this post without mentioning some beautiful examples from this area taken from the British Library's catalogue collection. They let us discover some very early Indian, Persian, Arabic and Russian recordings made in 1899 by the Gramophone Company in London.



Gramophone Record Catalogue, 1899

As part of the British Library's [Endangered Archive Program](#), a large collection of 1,408 Indian songs recorded on 78 rpm records were digitized and made accessible online in 2016. This unique material, focussed on the Odeon and Young India labels was sourced from private Indian collectors Suresh Chandvankar, Sunny Matthew and Narayan Mulan. Some very rare catalogues were also digitized, allowing us to enjoy their gorgeous illustrations and fascinating photographs while listening to some of the fabulous recordings available, such as [this solo of Sundari](#), a double reed instrument, performed by Vithal More.



Odeon Marathi October 1934 catalogue



Young India Catalogues – Gujrathi, March 1941

Find out more about the work of the British Library's [Sound Archive](#) and the

new [Save our Sounds](#) programme online.

Follow the British Library Sound Archive [@soundarchive](#) and the British Library's [World and Traditional Music](#) activities [@BL_WorldTrad](#) on Twitter.

[AlphaGo AI defeats Chinese master in 2nd match](#)

Ke Jie, a Chinese Go chess prodigy and the world's No.1 Go player, lost to Google's AlphaGo AI mid-game during their second match on Thursday.

The 19-year-old master began a best-of-three series against Google's artificial-intelligence-based Go system on Tuesday morning, during a week-long competition in the historic town of Wuzhen, east China's Zhejiang Province.

The dual was the latest contest between elite human Go players and AlphaGo, which has been developed by Google's DeepMind. The program defeated South Korean Go master Lee Se-dol 4-1 in March 2016.

Ke Jie dropped the first round of the best-of-three match on May 23, 2017.

The final game will take place on May 27.

[Xi'an forum promotes world dialogue of civilizations](#)



Chinese and foreign top scholars and experts pose for group photo during the 3rd Dialogue of Civilizations – Chang'an Forum held in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, May 21-22, 2017. [Photo/ China.org.cn]

Chinese and foreign scholars and experts gathered in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, this week for a dialogue of civilizations, and discussed how to build a community of a shared future for all humankind.

The 3rd Dialogue of Civilizations – Chang'an Forum was held May 21-22 at Northwest University in Xi'an, known Chang'an in Tang Dynasty when it was the capital. More than 30 representatives from academia, science institutes, think tanks, civil societies, diplomacy, business, translation and literature circles from eight countries discussed how to promote Chinese culture abroad, as well as dialogues among cultures and peoples from the countries along the route of the Belt and Road Initiative.

In a congratulatory message read out at the forum, Professor Yue Daiyun, chairman of Chinese Comparative Literature Academy and former head of Peking University Comparative Literature and Culture Institution, stated: "It seems we have entered a time of uncertainty when development and retrogression co-exist... We ought to stand firm and look further ahead, thinking how we can renew our actions and ideology within a much more complex context,"

Ambassador Mussie Hailu, regional director of the United Religions Initiative (URI) for Africa and Representative of URI to the African Union and United Nations, said there was "a strong need in our world more than ever to promote inter-religious and inter-cultural constructive dialogue to build understanding, trust and avoid holding a wrong image of others and overcome the fear of the unknown.

"We are constantly hearing of the challenges our world is facing. We must not wait for fundamental change to come from somewhere; meaningful change must

come from within. If everyone does his or her bit, together we can accomplish what is necessary. This forum will help to create such awareness in people's minds."

Gong Jianzhong, former ambassador of China to Ghana and the executive vice president of the China Public Diplomacy Association, also pointed out that resolution of complicated global problems should adopt the wisdom of different cultures, and that China always wants to achieve harmony when engaged in diplomatic relationships and exchanges with other countries. He hoped China could learn from other cultures while maintaining the cultural confidence of its own development, build a diversified cultural environment and promote progress and development of all humankind.

Professor Zhang Xiping of Beijing Foreign Studies University, Professor Zhou Hong from Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Xi'an's Vice Mayor Professor Fang Guanghua, German sinologist Wolfgang Kubin, Professor Russell Duncan from the University of Copenhagen, CERN physicist and researcher Ren Zhongliang, French Taoist Thomas Morillon, President of Northwest University Guo Lihong, Professor Hu Zongfeng, president of the School of Foreign Languages at Northwest University also attended and addressed the forum.

Gao Ping, president of the China's Qiaology Institute on Dialogue of Civilizations, told China.org.cn that dialogue at the spiritual and thinking level could guide human society, and dialogue in culture and belief areas bring about new ways of thinking, as well as understanding and reflecting the world and its meaning.

He pointed out that the renowned 20th Century British historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975) predicted, in his later years, that Western civilization had started to decline and Chinese civilization would take over and lead the world. "If Chinese people didn't realize their mission or they try hard but fail, the prospect of humankind indeed will be gloomy. "

His institute initiated the forum and has been promoting it for three years, "The dialogue of civilizations will be like the multifunctional and delicate Swiss Army knife to resolve human problems," he said, citing President Xi Jinping's speech at the Boao Forum for Asia in 2015 as his inspiration, in which President Xi proposed a conference of dialogue among Asian civilizations to be held with an aim to boost regional cooperation and development.

Gao later also proposed a Conference for Dialogue of Asian Civilizations to be inaugurated in Xi'an in 2018 for the sake of its rich culture and history that was for long a capital of dialogue for civilizations from around the world.

Beijing bans shared bikes in military areas

Shared bikes will be banned from military areas in Beijing starting Thursday, a military officer said Wednesday.

The off-limits zones include restricted military areas and hospitals, residential areas, and sanitariums administrated by the military in Beijing.

“Bike sharing has brought new problems to the management of military areas, such as illegal parking and entering and exiting without approval,” said the officer with the training management department of the Central Military Commission.

“The army’s image would be tainted once misuse like bike refitting or damage is found in military areas,” the officer said.

Shared bikes are being moved away from military zones, and inspections will be carried out by the department.

The Ministry of Transport on Monday released draft rules requiring local governments to strengthen oversight of the sector.

Bike-sharing services took off in Chinese cities in the past two years. They allows riders to hire bikes for about one yuan (about 15 U.S. cents) per hour via a mobile app, and drop them off for the next user.

The service has reduced traffic congestion and cut auto emissions, but haphazardly parked bikes often block sidewalks, causing complaints.

There were 18.9 million users of shared bicycles nationwide at the end of 2016. The number is expected to hit 50 million by the end of this year, according to the China E-Commerce Research Center.

Forecasting the future

Today I am publishing another piece with no reference to the UK or the election. I will resume normal posts tomorrow when national campaigning starts again.

Events, dear boy, events. Policy makers, governments and companies need to forecast the future as they shape their policies and decide what to do to serve their citizens or customers better. In recent years the main international forecasters like the IMF and World Bank, the ECB and the US authorities, have struggled to anticipate the banking crash of 2008-9 or the

Euro crisis that followed. Many companies have expressed surprise at the turn of events from Tokyo to New York, and were not anticipating the election of Mr Trump.

As someone who tries to set out a view of what might happen next by way of important background to policy debate, it is important to think through how you can improve your chances of understanding the trends and the risks. You begin as most do by forecasting the "knowns". You can people your forecast with factual dates for future elections, Central bank rate setting meetings, publication of important results, dates of Budgets and the like.

You can then move from this easy bit, to trying to forecast the unknown element within these events. I know the Fed will consider interest rates at its June meeting. I do not know what it will decide to do, though with many others I expect it to raise rates by another 0.25% based on what I have read from the various statements and analyses put out by the Fed and its members. Sometimes your chances of success are high because the organisation has given a steer or clear briefings in advance. Sometimes the data they will consider is available and again it may be obvious what they have to decide. I did not know Mr Trump's budget, but a lot of what he is proposing was in his programme for government put out by candidate Trump, so it was not that difficult to guess. I did not know Mrs Merkel would decide to cancel all her nuclear power, but could see that might happen by watching the pressure she was under from the anti nuclear lobby.

There are then the unknown unknowns, as Mr Rumsfeld once famously said. No one could know that a Japanese nuclear power station would be badly damaged by a tidal wave, leading to a major change of energy policy. All you can do is adjust your view promptly if such a thing happens.

The reason some of the world institutions are so bad at forecasting economies is they have a vested interest in stability and come to believe their own reassurances. They missed the build up of excessive credit because they persuaded themselves that the world could suddenly handle levels of debt and gearing through derivatives that would have been dangerous before. Worse still, they then brought the whole structure down by lurching to too tough a stance, presumably because they did really believe all these positions were risk reducing! An outsider could see more clearly. Many of us saw the build of debt and gearing in the EU and US was excessive and said so. A few of us saw the change of stance by the authorities was disastrous. If there is too much debt around the last thing you want to do is so tighten money that people cant afford to service their loans.

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