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Command Performances: Phonorecords Related to Books, and Classified

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Command Performances

Phonorecords Related to Books, and Classified



BURROW LIBRARY MONOGRAPH

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SOUTHWESTERN AT MEMPHIS

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FOREWORD

The vast improvements in and the increasing variety, popularity, and utility of recordings have presented new problems of classifying, storing, and making them readily available. Both librarians and private collectors face these problems. Therefore, at the request of faculty colleagues, including members of the Music Department and the Editorial Committee of the Burrow Library Monographs, the Librarian of Southwestern at Memphis, Dr. Jay W. Stein, has prepared some reflections and technical suggestions relating to phonorecords.

The relationship of books and recordings, of reading and listening; problems and objectives of cataloguing, subject-heading, classification and shelving for best acquainting patrons of the library with its resources in the field of recordings; the humors of "collectivitis"—these and allied matters are interestingly presented here by Dr. Stein.

Valuable as audio-visual aids are to education and aesthetic enjoyment, they will continue in the foreseeable future to remain *aids*. Even the projected, ubiquitous "Big Brother," with all the resources of television and intercommunication systems at his command, can't really tell us how and what to think and believe. Studies, *i.e.*, reading, will continue to "serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability," but these uses will be enhanced by the addition of new values through the medium of recorded sound.

A. T. JOHNSON
M. L. MACQUEEN
for

The Editorial Committee, Burrow Library Monographs.

To the generous donors of the Burrow Library, Mr. and Mrs. A. K. Burrow, this the second of the series of Monographs is dedicated, with gratitude and affection.

THE FACULTY COMMITTEE ON THE LIBRARY

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COMMAND PERFORMANCES

Phonorecords Related to Books, and Classified

Command performances of sounds from the wide repertory of human expression, from nature and machine, from past and present, are on call at mid-twentieth century. The advice of the Latin comic poet, "If you do not know how to speak, then learn to listen," rings modern. Millions of discs and tapes annually swell the varieties of human, natural, and mechanical sounds lending themselves to endless repetitions.

According to *Consumers' Research Bulletin* (November 1956), there were 142 phonorecord manufacturers in the United States in 1954. Thousands of dealers sold 221 million recordings, mostly discs at the speed of 78 r.p.m., valued at 79 million dollars. Programmed tape recordings, being developed commercially, add thousands more to these figures.

There are dozens of books about recordings, their collecting, and care; there are dozens more about playing equipment. Several widely distributed periodicals about phonorecords include *The American Record Guide* (formerly *American Music Lover*), *Disques* (Paris), *The Gramophone* (London) and *The Record Collector* (Ipswich). Leading newspapers and library and news periodicals review phonorecords regularly.

The popularity of recordings, not only for mere aural pleasure but also for instruction in speaking, singing, and playing, comes with little surprise. They have assumed an important role both in homes and in libraries. Cause for surprise, however, lies in reports that shelves and equipment for recordings are replacing once familiar book shelves in some homes. Bewildering are assertions that libraries dedicated to inform, entertain, and educate might expect recordings to receive as much attention as books, which gave the library its name.

A controversy among educators, intellectuals, and aesthetes over the relative merits and enduring qualities of books and recordings seems absurd when it ends with the bookman defending the future of the book; the soundman defending the future of the recording (and the "audio-visual" expert defending the future of the film.)

The question might rather be whether every medium of communication does not render a common service to mankind, each with its own peculiar advantages and disadvantages. The test lies in whether the spokesman for either medium is giving both sides a fair trial, whether, in fact, the bookman actually reads widely and also listens or the soundman listens widely and also reads.

Books and recordings released in multiple copies are essentially impersonal and one-way media of communication. Once made public,

neither communicates with privacy or intimacy. Far from conveying a person-to-person message, each medium carries its content to the entire world. Both media prohibit direct and simultaneous response or repartee. Thus, reading a book in multiple printing or listening to a recording in multiple pressing is not the same as directly participating in the written or recorded experiences related! The reader can read a book about mountain climbing and never actually climb a mountain; the listener can listen to a chamber music recording but never see or play in a string quartet. Against the passive characteristic of reading and listening and the vicarious quality of books and recordings lies the unfair criticism that they nurture intellectuals who live in ivory towers, removed from the realities of life.

The facts are quite the reverse. Both reading the printed word and listening to the manufactured recording enrich, rather than constrict, one's experiences. They serve a vital purpose of disseminating content which is both on and off the beaten track of the lecture platforms and concert halls. They are least subject to criticism when free of such external trappings as gadgetry, collecto-mania, and commercialism.

A phonorecord fan sometimes becomes totally absorbed in hi-fi turntables, speakers, needles, discs, and tapes. The shadings of variation in exact placement and perfection of the gadgetry become a cult for esoteric discussion about highest fidelity and fullest frequency range. So cranky can a hi-fi aspirant become that a parent has been known to deny the children any semblance of a phonograph until perfect playing equipment and a special music room can be afforded. In a sense, it's like denying oneself and one's family a house to live in until one can afford gold dinnerware, garbage disposal unit, velvet upholstery, and air conditioning.

Similarly, people have been known to deny themselves and others the ownership and availability of good reading until they can afford the best editions, special rooms, and proper furnishings. I have been in homes with fabulous collections and spent half the evening hearing about the floor-to-ceiling book casing, wall-to-wall carpeting, lamps, and acoustics. These concerns soared above the reading and discussion of books.

During tours of libraries, I have grown ill from being shuffled through grand new structures, along miles of shelving, under skies of fluorescence, along picture windows edged by flowing draperies, in and out of lounging and conference rooms, past aisles of shining tables and leather-back chairs, and down corridors of display casing and pegboard. For an hour I have toured library architecture and furnishings without once hearing about books.

By no means are these problems of carpentry and electronics, of architecture and acoustics, of furniture and lighting to be minimized.

On the contrary, the very fact that books and phonorecords alike must stand up to endless repetitions of their contents is reason enough to impose increasing technical and environmental perfection. Face to face with the author, composer, performer or narrator, in a live, single rendition, one might readily forgive his mistakes or the discomforts of the surroundings. But in the permanent and accessible form of books and recordings the content should be so perfectly and conveniently presented as not to betray its creator or inaccurately stereotype it for the reader or listener. The content of the book or recording is the all important end; technical, constructional, and environmental perfection are merely means. Unless, in fact, the content or the message is the important end of the communications media, technical and environmental fanatics wield a censoring influence, no less against Caruso's voice on low-fidelity wax, than against Plato's words in blurred fragment.

The collector or librarian smitten with quantitative collectivism, or collecting solely for its own sake, is another person apt to confuse ends and means. His case may be one of general collectivism (indiscriminately amassing all kinds of books or recordings) or selective collectivism (accumulating all the works in a particular category). There is also peripheral collectivism or the collecting of such items as bookplates, dust jackets, autographs, slip cases, needles, or imperfect copies, with no engrossing concern for other communication relationships. The amassing of "collectors' items" as objects with curious differences may have eventual museum value. But then again it may be little different from the stocking of potatoes in a vegetable bin or nails in a keg. With similar futility of purpose, it can easily be proved, both philosophically and scientifically, that no two of the potatoes or nails are absolutely alike or perfect either.

While harmless for the most part and giving pleasure to some, so singular an end as collecting is unworthy of the noble purposes of information and enlightenment. As a private aid to preserving valuable books and recordings for posterity, it is spasmodic and may interfere with more systematic institutional plans and procedures. As a professional blight, over-emphasis on collecting occurs among scattered librarians and bookmen who never look beyond the price, call number, title page, or size of a book. Individually or professionally, it is a denial of the rule that books are meant to be read and recordings are meant to be heard.

Collectors who also read their books and listen to their phonorecords are the most delightful conversationalists and friends of libraries. Librarians who, besides engaging in technical duties, read both books and reviews and listen to recordings offer unending fascination and usefulness to the community. For them books and phonorecords are important for what they communicate. Improved technical qualities of phonorecord and phonograph, attractive cases, cabinets, and furnishings; fine bindings, typography and paper, centuries of artisanship and handicraft of bookbinding art—these are aids to as-

simulating the contents of phonorecords and books. First and limited editions, rare copies, original pressings—the collecting and preservation of these is necessary for the source, matrix, and verification of content.

Phonorecords lack the physical beauties of books. Discs of any speed or tapes of any length are plastic products of the machine age, merely more finished than the tinfoil cylinder of 1877 on which Thomas Edison first recorded his own voice reciting "Mary had a little lamb." There is little joy in holding them in the hands; one cannot page them. They display no fine engraving or typography, no illustrations of Mary or her lamb. A phonorecord might have picture designs or ribbons of color which, as the disc spins, would cast changing reflections on the wall or ceiling. Otherwise, the only "browseable" part remains the album or slipcase which contains descriptive notes, texts or illustrations. The latter, incidentally, are among the best efforts of contemporary poster art.

Books require the skill of reading, an intermediary step between author and audience. The accuracy with which the author's words are transmitted depends upon the level and quality of skillful achievement on the part of the reader to change the printed page into meaningful perceptions. The size of an author's audience is likewise related to the number of persons able to read. Yet, two or more persons can hardly read the same copy of a book in hand at the same time and pace and derive the same meaning.

For recordings, the intermediary required is an instrument which transforms the grooves of the disc or the edges of the tape into audible perceptions receivable by the ears of numerous listeners simultaneously. Recordings played through an intermediary mechanism appeal more directly to a receiving sense than do the printed words requiring the intermediary process of reading. It is apparent how this directness is a boon to the blind, who cannot read visually. Of course, the fullness with which a listener receives the message of the sounds reproduced will still depend on intellectual and cultural achievements and exposures, and these are enhanced by applicable reading.

The quality of directness is most important in music, for music is meant to be listened to, and this can be done only when it is performed. True, musicians and scholars who read music can "hear" the notes of a musical score, but theirs is an even rarer skill than reading words and is only a preliminary to hearing the music performed. Recordings widen the opportunities to hear performances, allow millions more to hear more music than could do so only in the concert hall. At the same time recordings have interested many more people in attending concerts and in performing music.

Recordings offer more listeners widened opportunities to develop the memory and mental capacity to absorb. Listeners can follow, in actual sound, the origins and evolution of all types and styles of music,

speech, and language and the revelation of cultural similarities and differences in musical, dramatic, social, and political expression.

A purist sometimes bemoans "canned sound" as impure, unwholesome, and excessive. In terms of artistic appreciation and music education, however, the impurities appear to be of secondary concern. A Zurich University professor in UNESCO, *Music in Education* (Paris, 1955) defends "The Gramophone Record: An Aid in Music Education," for its "exact reproduction of timbre, tessitura, tempo and nuances," and "qualities which are not found in the acoustic, stylistic and aesthetic setting of an ordinary concert."

Phonorecords are bulkier and heavier than books. Even if science and industry develop and market a phonodisc of less size and lighter weight, the phonorecord will always require playback machinery, whose degree of fidelity will probably vary directly with size and bulk. Moreover, listening time, not counting cumbrous disc-shuffling or tape-turning, is much longer than reading time. Imagined audio replacement of the printed copy thus makes absurd the delightful act of curling up in an easy chair with a book. It ignores the general precedence of the printed page over the recorded disc, the historical commitment to writing and reading literature before hearing it. Except for such impromptu creativity as folk music, jazz, or story-telling, written, if not always printed, copy is still the best method of composing one's thought. Extemporaneous, oral reflections expressed in polished form in final edition are rarely possible.

No avid reader will underestimate those pleasurable and unique operations offered by books known as flipping, scanning, browsing, or setting his own pace. The eye cannot scan or browse the grooves on a phonorecord or the edges of a tape. A listener may shift the tone arm on the surface of the disc or watch the footage indicator on a tape recorder and thus find various parts of a work already known; he can omit or repeat portions. But he cannot assimilate faster or slower than the speed of recording and playback. Increasing or decreasing the speed any appreciable amount distorts the sound to a degree beyond comprehension, as would also be the case in any new invention aimed toward scanning, for the ear is incapable of "scanning" the whole at an individual pace. Only the eye and the skill of reading combine to do this. Under common obligatory pace, listening is less an individual act than reading.

Perhaps no element of modern mass communication bears complaints of annoyance so widely as does advertising. Magazines and newspapers in large measure and radio and television almost wholly are paid for by advertisers aiming toward sales appeal for millions. Several decades ago, books carried publishers' announcements in the back pages. Books now confine their advertising to the dust jackets, paper covers, or a page listing other works by the same author or in

the same series. Recordings, too, carry advertising only on the slip cases. Moreover, the advertising is for books or recordings themselves and not for cigarettes or hairdressings.

This freedom from pressure to consume helps to make books and recordings the chief servants of the intellectually and morally discriminating. They need not avoid subject content which interests only the thousands or the hundreds. More than once in history the printed word has carried minority truths and views through political and social barriers to other peoples and later generations. Frequently, recordings have been the means of disseminating and even saving from oblivion music which differs from standard repertoires and everyday favorites. Several private presses and recording groups have served as the avant-garde of thought and creativity. The preservation of the printed and the recorded over the years allows the patron of well-ordered libraries to read and listen to selections which would otherwise not come to attention in years of lecture attendance or concert going, formal education, or popular entertainment.

Precisely because education, inspiration, entertainment, and life itself cannot exist without the past, books and recordings share the common service of preserving the facts of history and the treasures of literature. Yet, books have the advantage of time. For only books have been with us for centuries as chronicles of their times. Books have the ideas and events of hundreds of years to convey and to draw upon, and offer as content for recordings.

At the same time, historians and literati will increasingly utilize evidence on recording. Underway are a dozen programs of documentation and "oral history" for preserving the voices and views of prominent personalities and their response to significant topics of the day. Museums and libraries have established archives for recorded history. A New York *Times* writer ranks the spoken documentation of one firm with "the Domesday Book and the Exchequer Rolls of the Middle Ages as prime source material for doctoral theses." In large measure the contents of the two media are interchangeable. A book may preserve in print the music or speech on recording; a recording may preserve the aural performance of the printed word.

The encyclopedic variety of recorded sound increases daily. Novelists, poets, and dramatists read from their best known works; humorists display their wit; artists reminisce and theorize; actors repeat their applauded lines; professors, preachers, and statesmen expound their views; instructors teach baseball, religion, hypnosis, sex, and the grammar and pronunciation of numerous languages. The sounds of festivities and disasters, of cities and countrysides, of earth and air, of animals, insects, and birds reveal further secrets of civilization and nature. Secular and sacred music of every instrumental and vocal medium and form; classical, popular, and folk song and dance; Broadway plays, Greek drama, motion picture sound tracks, and Biblical

texts inspire and entertain. The millions of discs and tapes carrying this scope of significant content double the active and responsive function of the library.

According to Webster's unabridged dictionary, second edition, a library is "1. An apartment, a series of apartments, or a building, devoted to a collection of books, manuscripts, etc., kept for use but not for sale . . . 2. A collection of books, etc., kept for study or reading and not as merchandise . . ." The active words, "use," "study," and "reading" are prominent, and the "etc." implies more than books. Throughout history, the recorded word would have been just as much recognized as a channel of free expression and inquiry, would have been just as susceptible to censorship as a free press and speech. Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe, and Jefferson recognized laboratory aids for ear as well as eye. Libraries approved by Aristotle or Aquinas would probably have included recordings, if they had been invented. Phonorecords might truly have been "the third dimension of the printed page."

A substantial collection of books and/or phonorecords whose contents are repeatedly enjoyed and studied has some semblance of order, if they are to be on convenient call for command performances. In library parlance, this involves classification, notation, subject-heading, and descriptive cataloguing. In his home, a private collector refers to his system of arranging or grouping books or recordings on the shelves, of labeling, and indexing.

So important is convenient and orderly accessibility, that many libraries have "open shelves," *i.e.*, shelves where people can locate or "browse" for books and recordings on their own. Shelves entirely "open" to everyone may not be possible. A private collector who invites his guests to browse freely among his volumes and albums may still have rare items in the closet reserved for limited handling. A public or academic library keeps irreplaceable or fragile volumes and recordings on closed shelves for restricted use. But restrictions ought to be the exception, at least for decidedly serious and responsible readers and listeners.

Open shelves of books or recordings are best arranged or classified to fit directly the needs and wishes of readers and listeners. For books, it is common in both homes and lending libraries to have a subject classification scheme. Best known are the Dewey decimal system, employed generally in public and college libraries, and the Library of Congress scheme, preferred in university and research libraries whose book holdings run into the several hundred thousands. Less widely adopted, except as "closed" systems in libraries serving vast crowds, are arrangements by size, accession number, or alphabetical letter. These require page attendance and sometimes other intermediary handling, checking, and guarding. Still other schemes have the flavor of antiquity or the hindrance of technicalities.

Unfortunately, the more exceptional, unbrowsable, closed-shelf systems have been widely adopted for the new medium of phonorecords. This adoption has been largely dictated under the apparent notion that phonorecords are more precious and less expendable than books, and from exaggeration of the viewpoint that they are more easily harmed by "browsing." The fact is that most damage to phonorecords occurs after they leave the shelf, from misuse on machines set at incorrect speeds, employing improper needles. Some librarians confuse this with harm to turntable, tone arm, or speaker. These kinds of damage hardly form a logical or justifiable basis for objections to open shelves for recordings.

Libraries may arrange phonorecords by size (12 inch, 10 inch, etc.), separating singles from album sets; by speed (78, 45, or 33.3 r.p.m.); by accession number; by manufacturer's label and serial number; or in a single alphabet. Any one of these may offer limited benefits or end in absurdity. Shelving by size or speed conserves space and looks neat; arrangement by manufacturer may be useful in a national depository. But stock room divisions are of no more help to phonorecord listeners than arrangement of books according to publisher, publication date, or copyright number is to readers. The more rigidly objective the system, the more dependent it is on numerous attendants and cataloguers to bring readers and listeners to the subject contents of the media.

However necessary as a key to the contents of either books or phonorecords, a catalogue or index offers only a partially satisfying preliminary step to actually seeing and handling the media themselves. However important for bibliographic purposes, the catalogue is not a substitute for browsing along openly accessible shelves, arranged by subject. While a listener can't "browse" a phonorecord in the sense of flipping its pages, he can find more ready detail in the descriptive information enclosed with phonorecords than can be included on catalogue or index cards.

Since subjects treated and adaptability to shelving raise problems common to both phonorecords and books, they might be arranged on common shelves. This would locate the recordings of Beethoven symphonies next to their printed scores and to printed commentary about the composer and his work. Adjacent to French language texts and literature the browser would find accompanying recordings in French. On the same shelf as the collected poems of Dylan Thomas he would find a disc of the poet reading them. If recordings had been invented and developed simultaneously with books, it is highly possible they would have been treated thus in libraries. The Library of Congress and Dewey decimal classification schemes might have included spaces in appropriate subject groupings for recorded knowledge to follow printed knowledge.

So deep, at least, is the interest in subject classification schemes, that many librarians taking on phonorecord collections think first of

classifying them according to the Dewey decimal system. This is certainly a possibility for grouping intelligently music, drama, history, and language. Partly, however, because Dewey's systematizing of the fields of knowledge relates directly to the printed word of nearly a century ago, and because the listening and the reading processes are not generally combined, neither a consideration of classifying books and phonorecords together on the same shelves, nor a wholesale adoption of the decimal classification has proved an adequate solution. The classifying of recordings lends itself rather to experimentation and pioneering.

Presumably the purpose of a classification scheme is to shorten the route to the full content of the media themselves. In an academic library, a classification decision must be made in accordance with the needs of the music, speech, drama, language, history, and government departments. In a public library, the decision relates to the patron interest in these and other fields which recorded sound can serve. In any kind of library, it makes good sense to consider groupings of listening materials according to major fields with subdivisions. Music listeners especially like to see their Beethoven separate from their Mozart, although they may prefer to find some recordings under performer.

As with books, mutually exclusive groupings are only partially possible. Physical separation of the two sides of a phonorecord containing different selections is even less possible than separation of two parts of a bound volume of printed pages. A dummy slip case can be placed in the shelf space where a recording would be classified if a separate item; a cross reference to its actual location can be made on the back of the dummy. Wherever selections in the same unwieldy album are on individual discs, physical separation of discs according to subject may be made, so long as any album unity otherwise desired by patrons is undisturbed. Cross-indexing showing distribution of contents and common or divided shelf location of individual selections of a set is, of course, a specific function of cataloguing.

Besides publishing *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging*, the Library of Congress prints and distributes catalogue cards for phonorecords in much the same style as for print and film materials. An article in the March 1953 issue of *Notes*, the journal of the Music Library Association, carries announcement of these services. The rules, approved by the Division of Cataloging and Classification for the American Library Association, may be obtained free of charge from the Card Division, Library of Congress, Washington 25, D.C. A section of the printed catalogue is devoted to music and "phonorecords, i.e., sound recordings, musical or non-musical, reproduced on all kinds of material, including cylinders, discs, tape, and wire." Since its first annual accumulation of semi-annual sections issued for 1953, it has become essential for librarians in ordering cards and in cataloguing on their own.

The card contains names of composer, editor, arranger, author, and performer(s), conventional titles for music according to the same rules that are used in catalogued printed music, title, manufacturer, series, physical description (number of discs or albums, size, speed), and medium. Space is reserved at the top of the card for typing subject headings or other entries and on the left margin for location notations. The cards are sold singly, in sets, or by subscription at very reasonable prices.

A comprehensive index in the *Library of Congress Catalog for Music and Phonorecords* provides an excellent subject control for the catalogued titles included. It is based on *Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogs of the Library of Congress*, 5th edition, its cumulative supplements and auxiliary lists, and the authority file of the Library of Congress. It uses terms in common American usage as subject headings and applies the most specific heading to the material entered.

The Library of Congress offers cataloguing only for its own selections from current releases. Thus, librarians cannot expect ready-made cards for phonorecords as extensively as for books. Large numbers of phonorecords, especially older releases and non-musical works, require that the librarian himself determine physical descriptions and subject headings. For this purpose, the Library of Congress catalogue is an excellent aid, since examples may be found for almost every kind of musical composition and an increasing number of dramatic, language, and documentary works. Its inter-filing of music in print and music on recording is almost predictive of possibilities of arranging them on common shelves.

The Library of Congress, apparently recognizing a variety of worthy efforts, declines to recommend a classification or notation for recordings, i.e., a scheme of arranging them on the shelves or designating their locations. Individual librarians and collectors have had to attack these problems on their own.

The Library of Southwestern at Memphis, having moved into a spacious new building, ventured to include recordings in its services. Its problem was to combine holdings of the music and other departments with continuing gifts from private collectors. The system of classification and notation, in effective operation for three years, covers a rapidly growing collection of about five thousand titles on three thousand discs. It is partially summarized here for such interest as it might be to others. While music receives chief attention, the general outline applies also to speech, drama, and other recorded content.