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Dissertation

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THOMAS ALVA  
EDISON TO MUSIC EDUCATION**

by

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This work is dedicated to my parents, Dennis and Faye Kelleher, the two most significant and influential people in my world.

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**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THOMAS ALVA  
EDISON TO MUSIC EDUCATION**

(Order No.                      )

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**ABSTRACT**

With the invention of the phonograph in 1877, Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) ushered in a new era of musical experiences. Among other things, his device provided new learning opportunities for both amateur and professional musicians, in addition to non-musicians.

By 1906, Edison recordings were being made for the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music's distance instruction program, five years before Edison's major competitor, the Victor Talking Machine Company, established its education department under the direction of Frances Elliott Clark (1860-1958). The major difference between the competitors' devices was that the Edison phonograph allowed users to record music and the Victor talking machine did not. Despite this disadvantage, the Victor device was marketed more successfully as an aid to music education. Although Edison's phonograph companies encouraged music education through student performance, self-recording, and correspondence feedback, in 1921 Thomas A. Edison, Inc. hired Charles H. Farnsworth (1859-1947) to, in part, replicate Victor's successful

approach to music education: learning to appreciate music through listening to recorded music.

While Edison and his phonograph have received considerable attention in some scholarly literature, there has been no significant research on his or his companies' involvement with music education. The purpose of this study was to help fill this gap in the literature. Toward that end, the following research questions were addressed: (1) In what ways did Thomas A. Edison contribute to music education? (2) In what ways did Edison's phonograph companies contribute to music education? (3) How, and to whom, did Edison's phonograph companies market their phonographs and other music education products? and (4) How did Edison's approach to music instruction via the phonograph differ from that of Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company?

Historical research techniques were used in this study, beginning with an examination of documents at the Thomas Edison National Historical Park in West Orange, New Jersey, the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) Historical Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the Music Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. These archives contain primary source material about Edison, Clark, and the Edison and Victor phonograph companies.



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## PROLOGUE

*[T]he history of the phonograph is at once the history of an invention, an industry and a musical instrument.*

—Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Throughout history, humankind has utilized the voice and various other natural materials to create sound, resulting in the emergence of innumerable musical styles through which human beings expressed a wide diversity of emotions and cultural influences. In so doing, people built a plethora of musical instruments and devices designed to facilitate the production of the tones and timbres mandated by various musics.

Because technology for recorded sound did not exist until comparatively recently, there are no audible reproductions of musical performances from anywhere in the world from before that period. That changed in 1877, when Thomas Alva Edison invented the first phonograph, a device that could record and then play back sound, which gave humankind the ability to preserve and revisit the aural past. Edison's phonograph enabled people to experience sound in completely new ways. This invention profoundly affected the roles of music in society, and ultimately the device and its successors changed the art form itself.

Edison predicted many applications for his phonograph, among them a role in the teaching and learning of music. Less than a year after its invention, he announced in *The North American Review* that his phonograph would fulfill the

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Gelatt, quoted in Dave Laing, "A Voice without a Face: Popular Music and the Phonograph in the 1890s," *Popular Music* 10 (January 1991): 1.

role of a “musical teacher,” allowing “... one to master a new air” and “... the child to form its first songs.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, children and adults were suddenly able to sing or play along with a broad range of musical recordings. Moreover, in addition to the phonograph facilitating self-learning without the presence of a teacher, music educators began to use it to augment their work in group and private settings.

One aspect of music education that benefited greatly from the invention of the phonograph was listening. Music educators were empowered to play recordings of a wide variety of literature by different types of performers, thereby exposing pupils to music heretofore unavailable to them, especially in classroom settings.

In addition to being able to listen to previously recorded music, people gained the capability of recording themselves on Edison’s cylinder phonograph. In 1900, the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music in Chicago began offering distance education in music;<sup>3</sup> by 1906, Edison recordings were being made for voice lessons offered by the school. Five years later (1911), Edison’s major competitor, the Victor Talking Machine Company, organized an education department and appointed Frances Elliott Clark (1860-1958) as director. Clark was a prominent figure in music education who in 1907 had presided over the first meeting of what would become the Music Supervisors National Conference

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas A. Edison, “The Phonograph and Its Future,” *The North American Review* 126 (May-June 1878): 533.

<sup>3</sup> Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, *Normal Course of Lessons in Piano and Harmony Given by The University Extension Method* (Chicago: Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, 1910), 6.

(MSNC),<sup>4</sup> currently The National Association for Music Education (NAfME).

The Victor Talking Machine Company and Edison's phonograph companies took sharply different approaches to music instruction. Under the direction of Clark, Victor sought to advance music education primarily through listening lessons that emphasized formal and historical concepts. Edison, on the other hand, promoted music education via student performance, self-recording, and correspondence courses in addition to discriminating listening. The distinct differences between the strategies of the two competitors in the promotion of their phonographs likely contributed to the emerging separation of the two symbiotic approaches to music education at the time, performance and listening, and eventually to the stark contrasts between the two major philosophical positions on the purposes of and approaches to music education that still manifest themselves in American music education.<sup>5</sup> Philosophical matters notwithstanding, music in the schools consisted largely of sight-singing in the nineteenth century, whereas by 1911 some listening-based "music appreciation" programs were beginning to appear, in school music and in private piano instruction.<sup>6</sup>

While Clark and her work have been widely (and rightly) acknowledged

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<sup>4</sup> For a biography of Clark, see Eugene Martin Stoddard, "Frances Elliott Clark: Her Life and Contributions to Music Education" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1968).

<sup>5</sup> While performance-based outcomes seemed to dominate the curriculum before and for a time after Edison's invention, listening probably always comprised at least some part of it; however, music instruction through listening was essentially limited to what the teacher could sing or play in class and to what the students could perform. See the section entitled "Music Education History" later in this prologue.

<sup>6</sup> Jere T. Humphreys, "Instrumental Music in American Education: In Service of Many Masters," in *The Ithaca Conference on American Music Education: Centennial Profiles*, ed. Mark Fonder (Ithaca, NY: Ithaca College, 1992); reprinted in *Journal of Band Research* 30 (spring 1995): 44-45. (Page numbers are from the reprint edition.)

in the music education literature, Edison's contributions have been conspicuously absent. Nevertheless, although music education was not a primary concern of Edison himself, he advocated the use of the phonograph in music education, and his companies produced materials aimed toward music instruction. Edison's contributions to music education were largely undocumented at the time and remain so to this day. This study helps fill that gap.<sup>7</sup>

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze some of the contributions of Thomas A. Edison and his phonograph companies to music education. The work also compares their approaches to music instruction with those of Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. In what ways did Thomas A. Edison contribute to music education?
2. In what ways did Edison's phonograph companies contribute to music education?
3. How, and to whom, did Edison's phonograph companies market their phonographs and other music education products?

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<sup>7</sup> See the section entitled "Literature Reviewed" later in this prologue.



4. How did Edison's approach to music instruction via the phonograph differ from that of Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company?

### **Delimitations of the Study**

While some contextual history that predates Edison's phonograph is given in this study, 1877 was used as the main starting point because that year saw the invention of the first device that could record and play back sound. The present study is also delimited to uses of the device in the United States, even though the phonograph quickly became an international phenomenon. Also, the main focus of the study is on the early roles of the phonograph in music education, not on its many other uses in society.

### **Definitions of Relevant Terms**

There are numerous references in the literature to cylinders and discs—the media used to record and play back sound on different types of phonographs. Harvith and Harvith helped distinguish between these mediums in their book entitled *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph: A Century in Retrospect*. The authors explained that Edison believed a cylinder rendered higher fidelity than a flat disc, and consequently he promoted the cylinder exclusively until 1912. At about that time Edison also produced a flat disc and marketed it as the Diamond Disc, "... a quarter-inch-thick record weighing ten ounces and employing, as his cylinders did, a 'hill and dale' method of sound reproduction in which a

diamond stylus vibrated up and down within a vertically undulating groove of variable depth.”<sup>8</sup> Harvith and Harvith went on to describe the composition of Edison’s Diamond Disc: “Made of a compressed blank containing wood flour and other materials, first coated with celluloid and later covered instead with condensite varnish, the records were molded, as were the cylinders, rather than stamped.”<sup>9</sup>

The literature also contained many names for the machines that utilized cylinders and discs, such as the phonograph, talking machine, and gramophone, among others. Mark Katz defined some of these names in his book entitled *Capturing Sound*. He wrote that the term phonograph “... originally denoted cylinder-playing machines only, while *gramophone* referred to machines that played discs.”<sup>10</sup> The latter medium eventually became more popular, and by the 1920s cylinder recording had become rare. For a time thereafter, “both terms referred to disc players,” but currently (2004) the term “... *phonograph* is used in the United States and *gramophone* in Great Britain to describe the record player.”<sup>11</sup>

### Literature Reviewed

The authors of survey books on music education history in the United States often mentioned the phonograph in the context of music appreciation, citing the valuable contributions to music education made by Frances Elliott

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<sup>8</sup> John Harvith and Susan Edwards Harvith, *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph: A Century in Retrospect* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 194. (Emphasis in original)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. (Emphasis in original)

Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company. Noticeably absent from these books are discussions of the contributions of the inventor and a major manufacturer of the device, Thomas Edison.

This lack of coverage notwithstanding, surviving evidence points to Edison's direct involvement in music instruction via the phonograph. One case concerned the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, a Chicago-based educational institution that employed the services of the Edison Phonograph Company. Other instances appear in the advertisements for Edison phonographs, as well as in the pages of the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, to name only a few.

### Music Education History

In his *History of Public School Music in the United States*, Edward Bailey Birge discussed the phonograph in the context of music appreciation. He noted that before the invention of the player piano and phonograph, someone had to perform music live to enable students to hear a work. The pioneering efforts of Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company, namely the production of a collection of recordings aimed toward use in the classroom, essentially eliminated the necessity for live performance as part of the study of music appreciation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Bailey Birge, *History of Public School Music in the United States*, New and Augmented Ed. (Reston, VA: *Music Educators National Conference*, 1966; originally Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1928), 212. The "New and Augmented Edition" was initially published by the Oliver Ditson Company in Bryn Mawr, PA in 1937.

Birge revealed that other companies assembled comparable libraries of recordings, but he did not name them. He also stated that "... phonograph companies began to train teachers and send them out into schools and to teachers' institutes and conventions to show how the subject of appreciation should be taught," but again, he did not disclose the names of those phonograph companies.<sup>13</sup>

Birge seems to have recognized the beginning of a "new era in popular music education," the emergence "... of the amateur listener on a nation-wide scale."<sup>14</sup> He did not, however, credit or include in his text a discussion, even a mention, of the inventor of the device that opened the door to this new epoch.

In his *Music Education in the United States*, J. Terry Gates provided similar coverage to that found in Birge's book. He stated that "The real beginning of music appreciation in schools ... came in 1911, when the Victor Company organized its educational department and placed Frances E. Clark in charge of developing educational uses for the phonograph."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, James A. Keene did not mention Edison in his *A History of Music Education in the United States*, whereas he devoted an entire chapter to Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Company's contributions to the teaching of music appreciation.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph A. Labuta and Deborah A. Smith, in their *Music Education: Historical Contexts and Perspectives*, followed the lead of other authors by

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>15</sup> J. Terry Gates, *Music Education in the United States* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 204-05.

<sup>16</sup> James A. Keene, *A History of Music Education in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Centennial, CO: Glenbridge Publishing Ltd., 2009).

mentioning Frances Elliott Clark's contribution to music appreciation, but they also failed to mention Edison.<sup>17</sup> Mark and Gary did reference Edison in their *A History of American Music Education*, but in a context not directly related to music education. That is, they grouped him with Alexander Graham Bell and George Eastman as inventors who helped the United States achieve world leadership status.<sup>18</sup>

### The Phonograph and Music Appreciation

It is clear that the authors of these music education history books believed that the phonograph greatly influenced the way music appreciation was taught in the United States. Richard Dunham stated in his dissertation on music appreciation in American public schools that the phonograph represented a milestone for the subject.<sup>19</sup> "By the time the United States entered World War I [1917]," Dunham declared, "the phonograph had become inseparably identified with the teaching of music appreciation."<sup>20</sup>

Nathan Bowers recorded an early instance, well before the beginning of U.S. combat in World War I, when he described a music appreciation lesson that appeared in a 1909 issue of *Musical America*: "... [F]irst, the record was played;

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph A. Labuta and Deborah A. Smith, *Music Education: Historical Contexts and Perspectives* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 26. Edison is mentioned in note 11 on page 130 as the person from whom The Edison Project—a non-music related educational initiative—took its name and as the inventor of the phonograph, motion picture projector, and electric lamp.

<sup>18</sup> Michael L. Mark and Charles L. Gary, *A History of American Music Education*, 3rd ed., executive ed. Frances S. Ponick (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2007), 186.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Lee Dunham, "Music Appreciation in the Public Schools of the United States 1897-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1961), 53.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

then the teacher explained what was heard; finally, a discussion of the singer ensued. No mention or emphasis was placed on the composer."<sup>21</sup> Bowers also reported that the article asserted the use of the phonograph in schools as having become standard "... due to its popularity among the students: children enjoyed listening to 'high class' recorded music."<sup>22</sup>

Mark Katz noted a parallel phenomenon among American adults who "... considered themselves lovers of 'good music,' but felt they lacked the abilities to explore the repertoire as amateur performers."<sup>23</sup> Supporting this line of thought with an answer found in a 1921 questionnaire from Thomas A. Edison, Inc., Katz included the response of one George Ruhlen: "'I am not a trained musician, never tried to sing correctly a single note and do not try to play any musical instrument of any kind, but am none the less [*sic*] fond of good music and for want of opportunities of hearing it have gone in for the phonograph'."<sup>24</sup> In 1926, Dorothy Fisher penned a similar statement that appeared in the *Phonograph Monthly Review*: "'[T]here are many others whose musical training, like my own, is completely nil, but ... whose intellectual curiosity about great music ... will

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<sup>21</sup> Nathan David Bowers, "Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph: Women and the Rise of Sound Recordings in the United States, 1877-1913" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2007), 251. The emphasis on the performer was somewhat different from the traditional and current practice of emphasizing composers, which reflects the orientation of the field of musicology.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Katz, "Making America More Musical through the Phonograph, 1900-1930," *American Music* 16 (winter 1998): 453-54.

<sup>24</sup> George Ruhlen, letter attached to his response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 18 February 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX; quoted in Katz, "Making America More Musical," 454.

receive great satisfaction in becoming familiar with music through the medium of the phonograph'."<sup>25</sup>

### The Phonograph in the Home and Gender Roles

Understanding the impact of the phonograph requires an examination of home life in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nathan Bowers discussed "... women's moral imperative to provide music (as culture) in the home in the form of quality entertainment and education, and women's responsibility to purchase the items for the home...."<sup>26</sup> He included a statistic given in *McCall's Magazine* in 1904 that women spent 90 percent of the family income.<sup>27</sup> According to Emily Thompson, they spent some of that money on phonographs: "In 1896 the Edison phonograph was first offered for sale to the public, and as early as 1900 it was recognized as 'a familiar object in our modern home life'."<sup>28</sup>

Bowers reproduced and discussed a number of advertisements in support of the claim that women were in charge of the family budget. He also concluded that advertisements for the phonograph focused primarily on women, increasingly so over time. One Edison phonograph advertisement even extended a free book offer to women that spoke to what Bowers noted was their "... moral

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<sup>25</sup> Dorothy B. Fisher, "Women and the Phonograph," *Phonograph Monthly Review* 1 (October 1926): 31; quoted in Katz, "Making America More Musical," 454.

<sup>26</sup> Bowers, "Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph," 259.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>28</sup> Emily Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877-1925," *Musical Quarterly* 79 (spring 1995): 138. Thompson quoted from [Author unknown], "The Manufacture of Edison Phonographic Records," *Scientific American* 83 (December 1900): 390.

imperative of providing music for the household.”<sup>29</sup> The text from this advertisement read:

If you have a home full of lively youngsters with their friends, some grown-up children, and a husband, for whose amusement and entertainment in the home you feel a certain responsibility, then we have a book intended for you particularly. This book tells what the Edison Phonograph is, what it does, how little it costs, and suggests ways in which the Phonograph adds to the pleasure of every one [*sic*] within your home.

This book is copiously illustrated by leading artists. It will be sent free, on request, to the mistress of every home, or any other reader of THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to aiming advertising toward women due to the roles they were thought to play in the home, Bowers reported that companies also targeted women for their recreational interest in performing music. According to him, it was not Edison who initially targeted this market; instead, it was the Victor Talking Machine Company that capitalized on this business opportunity.<sup>31</sup>

### Correspondence Schools

While he may not have been the first to capture the female market, Edison did promote to consumers a particular feature of his phonograph that was unavailable on a Victor Talking Machine. That feature was the capability of recording a sound, such as a human voice singing, and then playing it back. He reasoned that the ability of teachers and their students to hear recordings of their

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<sup>29</sup> Bowers, “Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph,” 182-83.

<sup>30</sup> *Ladies Home Journal* 27 (February 1910): 24; quoted in Bowers, “Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph,” 182-83. (Emphasis in original)

<sup>31</sup> Bowers, “Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph,” 248.



own voices would be more valuable than a student simply listening to recordings of professional singers.<sup>32</sup>

Some music educators at the time seemed to agree with Edison's argument that the recording feature was indeed important and relevant. Bowers pointed to the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, for which a student could capture a recording of his or her voice after listening to a lesson from the school on the phonograph that would subsequently be mailed to the instructor for feedback. This ability to obtain correction from teachers was evidently well received by some. Bowers included the words of a satisfied student from a Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music advertisement: "Your Voice Lessons, with the aid of the Phonograph, are a revelation; just like having the living teacher at my side. [I] [h]ave corrected the faults that retarded my progress, and am now succeeding beyond my expectations'."<sup>33</sup> Jerry Fabris, Curator of Sound Recordings at Thomas Edison National Historical Park, noted that there are fifteen different vocal recordings in the collection associated with the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music.<sup>34</sup> The National Park Service currently features one of these recordings on its website.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>33</sup> Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, [Advertisement] *The Etude* 31 (March 1913): 231; quoted in Bowers, "Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph," 250. The name of the student who made this statement is not given in the advertisement.

<sup>34</sup> Jerry Fabris, e-mail message to author, 6 August 2009.

<sup>35</sup> National Park Service, "Edison: Educational Lessons," U.S. Department of the Interior [website] (accessed 12 February 2012); available from <http://www.nps.gov/edis/photosmultimedia/educational-lessons.htm>; Internet. Identifying information for the recording was included as follows: Siegel-Myers School of Music-Vocal Record F. Record format: Edison Gold Moulded cylinder, Release date: c. 1906, NPS object catalog number: EDIS 103642.

In his article entitled “Band Lessons by Mail: A Look at Musical Correspondence Schools of the Early Twentieth Century,” Mark Fonder stated that Siegel-Myers was “[o]ne of the most successful” of the music schools that operated via correspondence. He also claimed that the school was international in scope and even awarded a bachelor of music degree.<sup>36</sup>

Albert Nelson Marquis, in *The Book of Chicagoans*, provided brief biographical information on the school’s founders, Samuel Siegel and Harry Thomas Myers. According to Marquis, Siegel was the originator of the school’s method of correspondence study and wrote the school’s first course of study for the mandolin. Harry Thomas Myers, on the other hand, formulated music schooling by way of correspondence. In addition to being a founder, he served the school as vice president, secretary, and director.<sup>37</sup>

Other correspondence schools operated during the early twentieth century, although according to Fonder formal options past high school for learning to conduct or for furthering one’s understanding of band instruments were limited. Yet, Fonder noted a novel business demand for the distance education music school due to travel limitations and other reasons.<sup>38</sup> In another

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Fonder, “Band Lessons by Mail: A Look at Musical Correspondence Schools of the Early Twentieth Century,” *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 13 (January 1992): 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Albert Nelson Marquis, *The Book of Chicagoans* [book on-line] (Chicago: A. N. Marquis & Company, 1911), 499-500, 618 (accessed 12 February 2012); available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=riITAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+book+of+chicagoans&hl=en&sa=X&ei=3Ug4T4ayB6aNsQKiqJSvAg&ved=0CDYQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=the%20book%20of%20chicagoans&f=false>; Internet.

<sup>38</sup> Fonder, “Band Lessons by Mail,” 1. Humphreys notes that instrumental music was accepted only very slowly by the MSNC, perhaps explaining why there was a need for band directors to study via correspondence as a forerunner of teacher preparation programs in instrumental music that had not yet appeared in colleges and universities. In fact, MSNC did not

article entitled “The Patrick Conway Military Band School, 1922-1929,” Fonder revealed other individuals who were giving correspondence lessons centered on band: Frederick Innes, H. M. VanderCook, W. M. Eby, and Fortunato Sordillo.<sup>39</sup>

### New Pedagogical Approaches

In an article on phonograph usage from 1900-1930, Mark Katz noted that “Some teachers even employed the phonograph as a pedagogical tool.” One approach mentioned by Katz was that of Oscar Saenger, whose vocal course included recordings with exercises that students could listen to and emulate. He revealed that additional methods were written with a similar approach in mind for other instruments. Katz preserved this testimonial from an amateur violinist named Marie Chaffee in 1921: “‘I often learn how to interpret a piece by listening to Mr. Spalding play it on the Edison—then I play it along with him’.”<sup>40</sup>

With these new approaches to learning music and studying music appreciation, music educators began to grapple with the pros and cons of the phonograph in general, and in relation to music instruction in particular. Bowers mentioned that as a result of recordings supplanting actual music making in the home and school environments, “... the definition of musicianship needed to be

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appoint its Committee on Instrumental Affairs until 1922. Humphreys, “Instrumental Music in American Education,” 55. (Page number is from the reprint edition.)

<sup>39</sup> Mark Fonder, “The Patrick Conway Military Band School, 1922-1929,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 40 (spring 1992): 65.

<sup>40</sup> Marie K. Chaffee, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 27 February 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries; quoted in Katz, “Making America More Musical,” 468.

altered.”<sup>41</sup> For some music educators, the new meaning of musicianship evolved from skill-based music making to “Cultivating an intelligent enjoyment of music”; according to Bowers, it ultimately “... became the highest goal of educator and student.”<sup>42</sup>

Bowers also documented some thoughts of Louis C. Elson, an educator who called into question the approach of attempting to teach all public school children to sing. Music appreciation as a curricular component, Elson believed, advanced “... an understanding of the elements of musical culture, an increasingly important idea in the growing humanistic education.”<sup>43</sup> Some post secondary institutions also incorporated the phonograph into their music programs. According to Bowers, Mount Holyoke College used recordings in a class setting in 1913.<sup>44</sup>

### Progressive Education

The conditions that set the stage for the acceptance of the phonograph in the school system were influenced by the industrial revolution that took place in the U.S. in the nineteenth century. During this time, and especially toward the end of the century, the curriculum was expanded to meet the needs of a changing society, with the primary goal being the betterment thereof. In his book entitled *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-*

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<sup>41</sup> Bowers, “Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph,” 251.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Zoltan Roman, “Music in Turn-of-the-Century America: A View from the ‘Old World’,” *American Music* 7 (autumn 1989): 319; paraphrased in Bowers, “Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph,” 251.

<sup>44</sup> Bowers, “Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph,” 252.

1957, Lawrence A. Cremin documented the changes that occurred as a result of what came to be known as the Progressive Education Movement, the genesis of which was ignited by a larger “... humanitarian effort to apply the promise of American life—the ideal of government by, of, and for the people—to the puzzling new urban-industrial civilization that came into being during the latter half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>45</sup>

Cremin pointed out that progressives sought to accomplish this objective by expanding the school’s purpose to focus on such areas as health and career orientation, in addition to the well being of family and community. They endeavored to incorporate new findings in the fields of psychology and social sciences into “pedagogical principles.” Progressive education furthermore entailed structuring lessons for the different socio-economic strata of students entering the public school system. “Finally,” Cremin concluded, “Progressivism implied the radical faith that culture could be democratized without being vulgarized, the faith that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well.”<sup>46</sup>

Cremin had very little to say about music, but Jere Humphreys traced the entrance of instrumental music into the schools during the progressive era. He identified 1893 to 1915 as the period when a majority of the current offerings in instrumental music education were rooted in formal school settings: “The fact that such a brief period encompassed the curricular beginnings of instrumental

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<sup>45</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1961), viii.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, viii-ix. (Emphasis in original)

music, music appreciation, and many new non-music subjects points to the importance of societal and educational forces in curricular decisions, at least during that era.”<sup>47</sup> These “forces” pointed to the effects of progressive education on instrumental music education and on music appreciation, the latter a subject the phonograph facilitated on a widespread basis after the door to it was opened by societal trends.

### Edison Music Research

According to one author, Edison engaged a psychologist to help promote his phonograph. Eleanor Selfridge-Field stated that psychologist Walter Van Dyke Bingham was hired by Edison’s phonograph company in 1920 to conduct research. She documented correspondence from William A. Maxwell, the vice-president of Thomas A. Edison, Inc., to Edison wherein Maxwell revealed that Bingham’s work “... could be developed into a ‘very big selling point’.”<sup>48</sup>

### Rationale

Thomas Edison is rarely mentioned in American music education history books, and then only as an historical figure responsible for the invention of the phonograph. Edison’s involvement with music education deserves greater attention, since his invention was marketed to and utilized by the music

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<sup>47</sup> Humphreys, “Instrumental Music in American Education,” 45.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, Phonograph Division, Box 71, letter of 10 November 1920 from William A. Maxwell to Thomas A. Edison; quoted in Eleanor Selfridge-Field, “Experiments with Melody and Meter, or The Effects of Music: The Edison-Bingham Music Research,” *Musical Quarterly* 81 (summer 1997): 292, 298, *passim*.

education profession for music instruction in schools and private lessons in the home.

As evidenced by some of his advertisements, Edison recognized that mothers were primarily responsible for the education of their children in the home. Thus, women were considered vital to the successful marketing and use of the phonograph. Their contributions to the history of the phonograph were acknowledged by Bowers in his dissertation, where he demonstrated how women "... established a recording culture in America, one that continues to affect the way we consume music a century later."<sup>49</sup>

Additional home uses of the phonograph occurred as a result of correspondence schools that existed during Edison's time, and which, according to Fonder, were "... still widely accepted as legitimate as late as 1922."<sup>50</sup> Edison's phonograph business was directly involved with the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, as evidenced by recordings housed at the Thomas Edison National Historical Park. The recording feature of his phonograph was an important educational tool for the correspondence school because it allowed both teachers and students to record themselves. While Bowers concluded that advertising this feature of the Edison phonograph was "wasted print,"<sup>51</sup> he clearly did not take into account that the recording function was being used for music instruction.

By contrast, Selfridge-Field noted that Edison foresaw the potential of the

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<sup>49</sup> Bowers, "Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph," 259.

<sup>50</sup> Fonder, "Band Lessons by Mail," 1.

<sup>51</sup> Bowers, "Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph," 130 (see note 7).

phonograph for transforming education.<sup>52</sup> In an interview with Harvith and Harvith, the renowned ethnomusicologist William P. Malm confirmed Edison's prediction for the field of music education in particular when he stated that "The phonograph has totally revolutionized the whole teaching of music."<sup>53</sup> Edison revolutionized much more than music teaching with his phonograph; he provided an entirely new way for people to hear and otherwise interact with music.

The popularity of the phonograph was undeniable, and one way Edison promoted his invention was through involvement with music via listening and performing, which facilitated a new appreciation of music for many people. "For many Americans, whether teachers, students, or music lovers," Katz noted that "there was nothing mutually exclusive about music appreciation and musical activity."<sup>54</sup>

The present study was therefore designed to focus on the contributions to music education of Thomas A. Edison and his various phonograph companies. The resulting document provides music educators and others with an interest in the subject an opportunity to examine how music education was directly and indirectly influenced by Edison, the inventor of the first device to successfully record and play back sound.

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<sup>52</sup> Selfridge-Field, "Experiments with Melody and Meter," 291.

<sup>53</sup> William P. Malm, interview, quoted in Harvith and Harvith, *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph*, 273.

<sup>54</sup> Katz, "Making America More Musical," 468-69.



### Sources and Techniques

The researcher gathered primary source material from two archives and one university library: the Thomas Edison National Historical Park in West Orange, New Jersey; The NAFME Historical Center, an archive of the National Association for Music Education located at the University of Maryland, College Park; and the Music Library at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. All three locations held relevant documents concerning Edison, his business operations, and the phonograph. Newspapers from various locales also yielded primary source material in the form of advertisements placed by Edison, testimonials from customers, and articles by and about Edison; many of the aforementioned items were stored on a website maintained by The Thomas A. Edison Papers Project at Rutgers University.

#### Thomas Edison National Historical Park

The Thomas Edison National Historical Park website describes the contents of the recordings in the archive:

Some of the earliest examples of recorded sound in existence are preserved within this unique collection. The subject matter of the recordings is mostly music, covering genres popular in the United States during Edison's era. Spoken word recordings include vaudeville comedy sketches, documentary speeches, educational lessons, and motion picture dialogue soundtracks. Experimental recordings document research carried out at the Edison Laboratory to develop recorded sound technology.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> National Park Service, "Edison: Sounds," U.S. Department of the Interior, [website]; available from <http://www.nps.gov/edis/photosmultimedia/the-recording-archives.htm>, accessed on (28 June 2009); Internet.

In addition to recordings, documents and photographs pertaining to Edison's life and business operations are archived there, many of which may be accessed by researchers. The complex includes Edison's laboratory and is both a tourist attraction and an educational venture.

The Thomas A. Edison Papers Project, managed at Rutgers University, was and remains a massive undertaking by many scholars and archivists to make available the large number of documents pertaining to Edison and his career. Though managed by Rutgers, the materials are stored at Thomas Edison National Historical Park, under the supervision of the U.S. National Park Service. Commencing in the late 1970s, the project grew in size and scope due to a significant increase in the number of known documents in the archives. Originally estimated to contain 1,500,000 artifacts, scholars and archivists eventually inventoried nearly 3,500,000 documents. The primary goals of that project included assembling microfilm and book resources and other materials to inform scholars and the public about Edison's life and career.<sup>56</sup>

Due to the vast amount of documents, archivists partitioned Edison's life and work into six periods (Part I: 1850-1878; Part II: 1879-1886; Part III: 1887-1898; Part IV: 1899-1910; Part V: 1911-1919; and Part VI: 1920-1933), resulting in five completed microfilm guides to date.<sup>57</sup> The first guide was filmed in 1984 and published in 1985 by University Publications of America. The microfilm edition mirrors the way the archives at Thomas Edison National Historical Park were

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas E. Jeffrey, *A Guide to Thomas A. Edison Papers: A Selective Microfilm Edition Part I (1850-1878)* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1985), 2.

<sup>57</sup> The sixth part of the microfilm edition is not yet complete.

systemized, including the Document Series and Notebook Series, among others, although not all documents housed at Thomas Edison National Historical Park were included in the microfilm edition. To help people find artifacts not published in the microfilm edition, the group also incorporated "... references to related material not selected for inclusion, ... [providing] an important entree into the larger collection."<sup>58</sup>

This is truly an important service because the entire microfilm edition contains only approximately ten percent of the documents housed at Thomas Edison National Historical Park. This means that of the approximately 3,500,000 artifacts, the entire microfilm edition is comprised of only approximately 350,000 filmed documents. On the other hand, many of the artifacts not entered include information deemed unnecessary for most types of research: "... (1) routine financial documents such as bills, receipts, invoices, vouchers, checks, and orders; (2) many of the day-to-day business records of the Edison companies; and (3) unsolicited incoming correspondence relating to matters outside the mainstream of Edison's inventive, business, and personal activities."<sup>59</sup>

Each guide to The Thomas A. Edison Papers Project includes several indexes. The types of indexes provided are as follows: "... (1) an alphabetical index to authors and recipients; (2) a chronological index to technical notes and drawings; and (3) an index to financial documents."<sup>60</sup> These indexes, particularly the alphabetical index to authors and recipients, proved to be invaluable to the

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<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey, *A Guide to Thomas A. Edison Papers*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-16, *passim*. Editorial aids called "targets" provide helpful data about the collection and include information about papers that were not filmed, especially for folders that contain some filmed and some unfiled documents.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

researcher, chiefly because the first four guides are posted as searchable PDF files as part of the Series Notes section of The Thomas Edison Papers website maintained by Rutgers, The State University.<sup>61</sup>

This website also includes a digital edition of the project with a searchable database.<sup>62</sup> The digital edition contains documents from the first three parts of the microfilm edition as well as additional items not part of the Thomas Edison National Historical Park archive. This vitally important resource was particularly valuable because archivists at Thomas Edison National Historical Park do not provide outside researchers direct access to certain documents represented in this database.

#### NAfME Historical Center

The NAfME Historical Center at the University of Maryland, College Park holds the Frances Elliott Clark Papers as well as the Howe Collection of Musical

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<sup>61</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, "Series Notes," [website]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/srchsn.htm>, accessed on (9 February 2012), Rutgers; Internet.

<sup>62</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, "Digital Edition," [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/digital.htm>, accessed on (9 February 2012), Rutgers; Internet. Guidance for citing items from the Digital Edition is provided at: <http://edison.rutgers.edu/citationinst.htm>. As suggested, in the present document each citation that references the Digital Edition ends with TAED, in addition to the Document ID, Folder/Volume ID, and Image number.

For example, a drawing of two women wearing telephone and phonograph bonnets is cited in the following manner: The Thomas Edison Papers, "Spring Bubbles," *NY Daily Graphic*, 12 April 1878, [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=MBSB10500X&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (11 February 2012), TAED, MBSB10500X [Document ID], MBSB1 [Folder ID], Image 166 of 343, Rutgers; Internet. To access this image, it is necessary to type the Document ID, MBSB10500X, into the "Document ID:" box at the "Single Document or Folder" webpage (<http://edison.rutgers.edu/singldoc.htm>), and click "Enter" [the web address retrieved as an outcome of this step is used in the citation]. At times, which is the case here, the image number of the citation is not the first image number to appear. It is therefore necessary to click the "Next Image" button until the desired image number is reached, eight times in this instance, or to type the precise image number into the box underneath the "Go to image" button, which subsequently must be clicked.

Instrument Literature,<sup>63</sup> both of which include relevant material. Along with documents about Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company, these collections hold material on the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music and artifacts concerning Thomas Edison and his phonograph businesses.

Founded in 1968 by the Music Educators National Conference, the archive helps preserve items related to the history of music education. It is the official location for documents pertaining to what is now called the National Association for Music Education (NAfME). Among other things, papers archived in this repository include those of leading figures of the organization, such as Frances Elliott Clark.

#### University of Michigan Music Library

Another important collection is housed in the Music Library at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In addition to the historically significant sheet music collection of Thomas Edison, this repository contains other relevant documents that were enumerated in the *Sonneck Society Bulletin*:

To be found here are lists comparing Edison recordings to those of its major competitor, the Victor Company; letters written to Edison, ... surveys returned by Edison customers, some including Edison's notations and carbon copies of replies made to correspondents....<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Richard J. Howe donated literature related to the music industry and the manufacture of instruments such as the piano and organ, along with mechanical musical instruments including the phonograph. See "The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature," [website], available from <http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/2992> (accessed July 10, 2012); Internet.

<sup>64</sup> Sonneck Society, "University of Michigan Acquires Edison Collection," *Sonneck Society Bulletin* 17, No. 1 (1991): 4. The original source is cited at the end of the article on page 6 as follows: "This article is reprinted with permission from *Music at Michigan*, Volume 23, No. 2 (spring 1990), published by the University of Michigan School of Music."

Particularly pertinent to this study are the responses to a Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaire that was distributed in 1921. Equally important are the replies to respondents from Thomas A. Edison, Inc. and the company's Record Service Department that offer additional insights into the business aspects of the recording industry during the early twentieth century.

### Other

A wide variety of secondary source materials in the form of books, biographies, doctoral dissertations, master's theses, and journal articles that reference Thomas Edison were also consulted. Various databases led to documents in the fields of science, business, and industry. Encyclopedias, reference works, and musicological writings were also examined for this study. Newspapers from different regions supplied additional source material.

### Methodology

The primary sources for this dissertation are predominantly derived from two archives and one university library. Thomas Edison National Historical Park contains the largest amount of original documents related to Thomas A. Edison himself and his phonograph companies' business operations. To compare and contrast the contributions of Edison and his phonograph companies to music education with those of Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company, archives at the NAFME Historical Center were examined. The Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaires housed in the Music Library at the University of

Michigan include a number of responses that reveal important details of the business operations of the phonograph company, depict the views of actual phonograph owners surrounding Victor and Edison products, and show some ways in which individuals were using Edison's phonograph to learn music.

While the search could have been narrower, the lack of coverage in the music education literature surrounding the contributions of Thomas A. Edison and his phonograph companies to the field seemed to suggest that a large amount of exploratory work was required. Due to the enormous number of individuals and companies involved in selling Edison-related phonograph merchandise and the international presence of Edison phonograph products, however, delimitations were necessary in the ways that are outlined earlier in the prologue of this document.

Even though music education historians and musicologists have documented much of the primary source material from all three locations utilized in this dissertation, their interpretations of the data have done little to add to the scant existing knowledge of the contributions of Thomas A. Edison and his phonograph businesses to the field of music education. As was noted earlier in the "Literature Reviewed" section of this document, music education historians have ignored Edison or simply acknowledged him as the inventor of the phonograph in their survey books on music education history in the United States. William Ronald Lee, in his dissertation entitled "Education Through Music: The Life and Work of Charles Hubert Farnsworth (1859-1947)," touched upon an important contribution to music education made by Thomas A. Edison,

Inc. as a result of the relationship between the company and the subject matter of his work.<sup>65</sup> In his dissertation entitled “Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph: Women and the Rise of Sound Recordings in the United States, 1877-1913,” Nathan David Bowers recognized the major impact women had on the success of the phonograph and how the device was being used in the home, even noting that Edison’s phonograph offered people the opportunity to record themselves.<sup>66</sup> While both Lee, writing from a music education historical perspective, and Bowers, offering a musicological viewpoint, touched upon important areas regarding Edison and music education, the purposes of their respective dissertations did not require closer scrutiny of the topic. In his book entitled *Capturing Sound*, musicologist Mark Katz quoted important material from the Thomas A. Inc., questionnaires and he commented upon the phonograph in the home as well as in the school. However, he also dedicated most of his analysis of the phonograph in music education to Victor and Clark.<sup>67</sup> Other writers previously mentioned, such as Stoddard and Dunham, have provided similar coverage. The brevity of this historiographical discussion is a consequence of the aforementioned type of reporting and the paucity of scholarly writing surrounding the contributions of Thomas A. Edison and his phonograph companies to music education.

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<sup>65</sup> William Ronald Lee, “Education Through Music: The Life and Work of Charles Hubert Farnsworth (1859-1947)” (D.M.A. diss., University of Kentucky, 1982), 92-97.

<sup>66</sup> Bowers, “Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph,” 130 (see note 7).

<sup>67</sup> Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 54-67.



### Document Structure

Save for the following short biographical introduction to Thomas A. Edison, the remainder of this dissertation is divided into three chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter is designed to document some of the ways in which Edison contributed to music and music education. The invention of the phonograph is discussed, and Edison's thoughts about music and his musical tastes are explored. The topic of machine-made or mechanical music is included to place the phonograph in context historically with its predecessors, such as the player piano. Edison's interactions with one of the great detractors and later proponents of the phonograph, John Philip Sousa, are highlighted to show some of the controversy the device created in music and music education.

Edison's phonograph businesses are the focus of the second chapter, namely the National Phonograph Company and Thomas A. Edison, Inc. Material related to music education is drawn from a publication entitled the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, which was used by the aforementioned companies to inform their phonograph dealers. The use of the recording feature of Edison's phonograph resulted in literature detailing proper recording techniques, and select images present these early recording methods. The recording feature was exploited to facilitate music learning, both private and commercial. One important instance is that of the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, which incorporated Edison products into its distance education program for private vocal lessons. Some of the other schools that employed Edison's phonograph are examined, and selected advertisements promoting the recording

feature are considered. A few of the ways that Edison's phonograph was deployed for ethnomusicological purposes are considered, and background information surrounding the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaires is provided, along with some responses that reveal how Edison's phonograph was used in the home to learn music.

One of Edison's major competitors in the general phonograph market as well as in music education, The Victor Talking Machine Company, is an important part of the subject matter in the third chapter. The influential work of Frances Elliott Clark as the head of Victor's educational division is one focal point, and the unsuccessful attempt by Thomas A. Edison, Inc. to, in part, replicate Victor's success in the school market under Clark by hiring Charles Farnsworth to lead its school research department is another significant element. Additional responses from the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaires are contemplated in relation to the two competitors, Edison and Victor, with replies from the Record Service Department of Thomas A. Edison, Inc. and this company's vice president.

The concluding portion of this dissertation begins with the epilogue. Here, the material presented earlier in this document is summarized, and the implications of the research findings are discussed. Suggestions for future research are provided, along with concluding comments about this dissertation's meaning for music education.

### Thomas A. Edison

Thomas Alva Edison was born in Milan, Ohio on February 11, 1847, the son of Samuel and Nancy Edison.<sup>68</sup> The Edison family can trace its roots to Holland, from which members moved to the U.S. circa 1730 and settled around Caldwell, New Jersey. Thomas A. Edison's great-grandfather was a banker who worked on Manhattan Island and lived to see his 104th year. While this great-grandfather was a patriotic American who believed in the rebellion of the War of Independence, his son, John Edison, Thomas A. Edison's grandfather, moved to Nova Scotia because he was loyal to the British Crown. John's son, Samuel Edison, was therefore born in Canada, where he met Nancy Elliott. The daughter of a Baptist minister, Reverend John Elliott, Nancy was born in New York in 1810. Thomas A. Edison's parents met in Vienna, Ontario, where Nancy was teaching in a public high school.

Samuel Edison had many jobs, among them innkeeper, shingle maker, truck (produce) farmer, and land speculator. He had to flee to the U.S. without his wife and four children because he supported an uprising against the Canadian government. He then settled for several years in Milan, Ohio, where Thomas Alva Edison was born, the youngest of Samuel and Nancy's seven children, on February 11, 1847.

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<sup>68</sup> The material in this biographical sketch of Edison was taken from: Frank Lewis Dyer and Thomas Commerford Martin, with William H. Meadowcroft, *Edison: His Life and Inventions*, 2 vols. (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1910; rev. ed. 1929); Paul Israel, *Edison: A Life of Invention* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998); William H. Meadowcroft, *The Boys' Life of Edison* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1911); and Randall Stross, *The Wizard of Menlo Park: How Thomas Alva Edison Invented the Modern World* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2007). A comprehensive list of biographical resources concerning Thomas A. Edison may be found at <http://edison.rutgers.edu/fullbib.htm> (accessed June 17, 2012).

Although Edison was born in Milan, he was raised in Port Huron, Michigan, the city to which the family relocated when he was seven years old. As he entered the second decade of his life, Edison began experimenting with chemicals, and he created his own laboratory in the cellar of the family home. His school attendance was irregular in part because he was labeled “addled,” and his mother, being a former schoolteacher, decided to teach him at home.

In 1859, Edison obtained a job for the Grand Trunk Railroad selling newspapers on trains that ran between Port Huron and Detroit. He turned a compartment in the baggage car into a laboratory, where he experimented with chemicals during his free time. An unfortunate train incident when he was approximately fifteen years old caused one of his chemicals to ignite a fire, and the enraged conductor hit him on his ears, an experience Edison attributed as the cause of his hearing impairment and near deafness.

Edison also became an itinerant telegrapher instead of pursuing formal education, but spent the vast majority of his teenage leisure time reading and experimenting. While working as a telegrapher in Boston in his early twenties, he patented his first invention, a vote recorder. He eventually established his own laboratory in Menlo Park, south of Newark, New Jersey, that was completed in 1876 and served as the birthplace of the phonograph in 1877.

Thomas Edison was married twice, the first time to Mary Stilwell in 1871. The Edisons’ first child was a girl named Marion Estelle, born in 1873. They also had two boys, Thomas Alva, Jr. and William Leslie. Mary Edison died in 1884

and Edison married Mina Miller in 1886. Thomas and Mina had one daughter, Madeleine, and two sons, Charles and Theodore.

During their engagement, Edison had Mina choose where the family would live and she selected a mansion in Llewellyn Park, located in West Orange, New Jersey. Edison established his laboratory not far from this estate, which they named Glenmont. These two landmarks comprise what is known today as Thomas Edison National Historical Park. Edison continued working at this location until his death on October 18, 1931, at the age of 84.

## CHAPTER I

EDISON'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO  
MUSIC AND MUSIC EDUCATION

*You have made the art of the musician immortal, Mr. Edison, by preserving the interpretations of the great performers.*

—John Philip Sousa<sup>69</sup>

As a child, Edison exhibited interest in music, the art form that he would change forever. According to Edison's biographers Frank Lewis Dyer, who served as president of the National Phonograph Company, and Thomas Commerford Martin, president of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, Edison's "extraordinarily retentive memory was shown in his easy acquisition of all the songs of the lumber gangs and canal men" before he was five years old.<sup>70</sup>

Edison received formal instruction in music for a brief period when he attended a private school operated by Reverend George Engle. Paul Israel, who wrote a recent biography about Edison and currently directs the Thomas A. Edison Papers project, reported that forty dollars was the annual fee charged for instruction in music in 1854. While attending the school, Edison had music lessons with a Miss D. Edson. In addition to being exposed to music at school, the Edison family had a piano in their home.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> John Philip Sousa, interview, quoted in James Francis Cooke, "A Momentous Musical Meeting," *The Etude* 41 (October 1923): 663. Sousa said this to Thomas Edison when Cooke brought them together for an interview at Edison's laboratory, now Thomas Edison National Historical Park, in West Orange, NJ for this fortieth year anniversary issue of *The Etude*.

<sup>70</sup> Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Israel, *Edison*, 6-7. Israel did not record how long Edison went to Engle's school, since the dates of attendance are not known. It is believed he went to the school right after the family settled in Port Huron, hence the 1854 fee schedule. Nevertheless, Israel did report on finding two people who remembered Edison from a public school in 1860, so he could not have attended Engle's school for very long. It is also not clear who paid Edison's tuition for Engle's school. Israel

As a teenager, Edison enjoyed eating and drinking to the sounds of German music. Milton F. Adams reminisced about those times to Dyer and Martin, recalling:

Aside from an occasional visit to the Loewen Garden “over the Rhine,” with a glass of beer and a few pretzels, consumed while listening to the excellent music of a German band, the theatre was the sum and substance of innocent dissipation.<sup>72</sup>

Israel chronicled that Edison helped improve his telegraph prowess by copying plays with a friend.<sup>73</sup> He also claimed that Edison had aspirations to become an actor, a “tragedian,” while he was employed as a telegraph operator in Cincinnati in 1865.<sup>74</sup>

Even though Edison never became an actor, he continued to take pleasure in the theater. When asked by Rufus R. Wilson about what he enjoyed when he was not working or reading in the decade before the turn of the twentieth century, Edison replied: “I like the theatre, and should go very often were it not that my deafness makes it hard for me to hear what the actors say.” With opera, Edison could experience acting along with singing, and the louder volume as compared to spoken dialog may have made it easier for him to hear. As he continued to discuss things he enjoyed doing in his spare time, Edison said, “With light opera I fare much better, and when I can get a seat in the front row, am able to hear the music without much trouble.” Edison revealed to Wilson that

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did note, however, that Engle later wrote to Thomas Edison in 1885, who was 38 years old that year, for monetary support, as Engle did not make Edison’s father—who Engle claimed was struggling financially—pay the tuition when Edison was a child.

<sup>72</sup> Milt Adams, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 71. Loewen Garden was located in Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>73</sup> Israel, *Edison*, 28.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 478. See note 25 in Israel’s book.

he had been a decent singer in times past: "I am fond of music, and used to be a pretty fair singer until I ruined my voice experimenting with the telephone and phonograph."<sup>75</sup>

Edison was not one to shy away from the topic of his deafness. He recounted to Dyer and Martin the story about the experience he believed led to his hearing impairment:

My train was standing by the platform at Smith's Creek station [Michigan]. I was trying to climb into the freight car with both arms full of papers when the conductor took me by the ears and lifted me. I felt something snap inside my head, and my deafness started from that time and has ever since progressed.<sup>76</sup>

Israel speculated that an accident with chemicals might have contributed to the handicap. He wrote that Edison remembered "... the baggage master who put out the fire 'got a bad burn and boxed my ears so severely that I got somewhat deaf thereafter'."<sup>77</sup> Israel reported on the findings of a doctor who examined Edison in his final years of life, who deemed the hearing impairment to be a "... congenital degenerative disorder that could have been brought on early by a trauma."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in The Thomas Edison Papers, Thomas Alva Edison, "Edison on Inventions. A Remarkable Interview with the Great Inventor," interviewed by Rufus R. Wilson, [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=SC90094A&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (6 February 2012), TAED, SC90094A [Document ID], SC90 [Folder ID], Images 94-98 of 98, 344 (this page number is found on Image 96), Rutgers; Internet. The editors include the following information: "Although internal evidence indicates that this interview was conducted in early 1890, it was published in *Monthly Illustrator / Home & Country* in November 1895." Since Edison was mostly deaf, he may have shouted frequently while attempting to capture and reproduce his voice, thereby damaging it, as may be noted later in this chapter (see "The Birth of the Phonograph").

<sup>76</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 37.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas A. Edison, quoted in Israel, *Edison*, 17. See also p. 476 in Israel's book, note 63.

<sup>78</sup> Israel, *Edison*, 17. These are Israel's words and not those of the physician.



Regardless of how his hearing problem came about, Dyer and Martin noted that Edison considered it beneficial to his vocation. While working as a telegraph operator, for instance, he disclosed that while his coworkers were distracted by the sounds of other instruments in the office, he was not deterred because he "... could only hear the instrument directly on the table at which [he] sat."<sup>79</sup>

Edison recalled that one of the problems that plagued the telephone in its early stages of development was the low volume of the receiver. He conducted research on how to increase the volume so he could hear it, and came to believe that his improvements "... made the telephone commercial, as the magneto telephone receiver of [Alexander Graham] Bell was too weak to be used as a transmitter commercially."<sup>80</sup>

Despite his difficulty hearing, or perhaps as a result thereof, Edison seemed particularly sensitive to how the phonograph reproduced speech. He told Dyer and Martin about overcoming what he excogitated to be its "great defect," "... the rendering of the overtones in music, and the hissing consonants in speech." In so doing, his incredible work ethic was manifested: "I worked over one year, twenty hours a day, Sundays and all, to get the word 'specie' perfectly

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 38.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. While Bell won the race to produce the telephone, Edison and Elisha Gray were also experimenting to do the same. According to Israel, "Gray had certainly thought about the possibility of transmitting speech and included a device for this purpose in the caveat he filed on February 14, 1876, the same day that Bell filed his first telephone patent application. Edison, too, filed a caveat, in January 1876, that contained a device he later called the 'First Telephone on Record' and that he said he had designed and tested the previous November. Edison, however, made no claim at the time regarding the transmission of speech. Only after Bell demonstrated his telephone did either Gray or Edison see any commercial possibility in such an instrument, and during 1876 they both continued to focus their efforts on acoustic telegraphy." Israel, *Edison*, 130-31.

recorded and reproduced on the phonograph.” This proved to be a major breakthrough for Edison: “When this was done I knew that everything else could be done—which was a fact.”<sup>81</sup>

In his adult years, Edison continued to enjoy experiencing music, including performing it, if only informally. In his laboratory at Menlo Park, for example, there was a pipe organ that he played from time to time.<sup>82</sup> Dyer and Martin recorded a reflection of a Mr. Upton, who recalled: “[O]ften during the period of the invention of the incandescent lamp, when under great strain and fatigue, Edison would go to the organ and play tunes in a primitive way, and come back to crack jokes with the staff.”<sup>83</sup>

The organ seems to have been used regularly, according to Dyer and Martin, who recorded that after a late-night meal at the laboratory someone would play a tune on the organ and the others would sing along. They wrote of other instances when someone would give a solo performance to provide entertainment. One person who sang for the group was described to Dyer and Martin as having “... a voice that sounded like something between the ring of an old tomato can and a pewter jug. He had one song that he would sing while we roared with laughter.” The zither, too, was played occasionally to accompany the singing of some German songs by the group.<sup>84</sup>

As may be gleaned from the aforementioned instances, the atmosphere for Edison and his workers seemed altogether jovial during breaks from work. Dyer

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<sup>81</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 38.

<sup>82</sup> Leonard DeGraaf, *Historic Photos of Thomas Edison* (Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing Co., 2008), 19.

<sup>83</sup> Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 281.

<sup>84</sup> Mr. Jehl, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 280.

and Martin memorialized that visitors to the laboratory were sometimes able to experience the camaraderie. When it was time to return to work, for example, visitors on occasion would leave with a song: “[W]hen we were ready to resume work, our visitors would intimate that they were going home to bed, but we fellows could stay up and work, and they would depart, generally singing some song like *Good-night, ladies!*”<sup>85</sup>

While it is evident that Edison had little formal training in music, he did procure music instruction for his son, Theodore. Leonard DeGraaf published an image in his book, *Historic Photos of Thomas Edison*, of Theodore in a piano lesson at the Edison house, Glenmont, with Lucy Bogue, one of the family’s servants.<sup>86</sup>

The education of youth was one of many topics about which Edison held strong opinions, particularly when it came to reading. He spoke to Dyer and Martin about practicing to read print rapidly, thus gaining the ability to “... sense the meaning of a whole line at once.” He believed that this skill, which he thought could be “easily acquired,” was a curricular must. “Then,” he said, “one can read two or three books in a day, whereas if each word at a time only is sensed, reading is laborious.”<sup>87</sup>

In addition to reading, Edison held that playing with toys was important for developing the mind, and he envisioned a science-based toy company for children as a bona fide way of educating youth. Israel quoted Edison from a 1911 interview published in *Century Magazine*: “[T]here are great possibilities in

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. (Emphasis in original)

<sup>86</sup> DeGraaf, *Historic Photos*, 153.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 64.

starting the mind right with toys. Give them problems to work out that will make them think for themselves ... a scientific kindergarten'."<sup>88</sup>

Thinking for oneself was an important principle Edison supported for adults as well, and, as an imaginative person himself, Edison knew that people would employ the phonograph in different ways. "Your own mind will suggest important uses to which it may be put," he said in an article entitled "Edison, The Magician." This article appeared not long after he first predicted the phonograph would be used for music instruction, and, here again, he promoted the device accordingly. "It will be used to teach music," Edison reiterated, "and to enjoy music, too."<sup>89</sup>

Figure 1 shows a piece of promotional material that touted Edison's belief in the phonograph's ability to facilitate enjoyment and instruction. The inscription at the bottom of the postcard reads: "He regards it as the greatest of instruments for home entertainment and education. That is why he was quoted as saying: 'I want to see a Phonograph in every home'."<sup>90</sup> A respondent from St.

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Waldo P. Warren, "Edison on Invention and Inventors," *Century Magazine* 82 (1911): 418. This information was found in Israel, *Edison*, 100. See also p. 484, note 40 in Israel's book.

<sup>89</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, Jerome, "Edison, The Magician," *Correspondence Cincinnati Commercial* (New York, April 1), [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=SB031087a&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (6 February 2012), TAED, SB031087a [Document ID], SB031 [Folder ID], Image 58 of 69, Rutgers; Internet. This article is on the right hand page of the scrapbook and concludes with the following authorship identification: JEROME.

<sup>90</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historic Park, Edison Postcard, Primary Printed Collection, Box 26, Misc., photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

Paul, Minnesota to Edison's questionnaire supported Edison's imperative, stating: "Every family should have the Edison."<sup>91</sup>

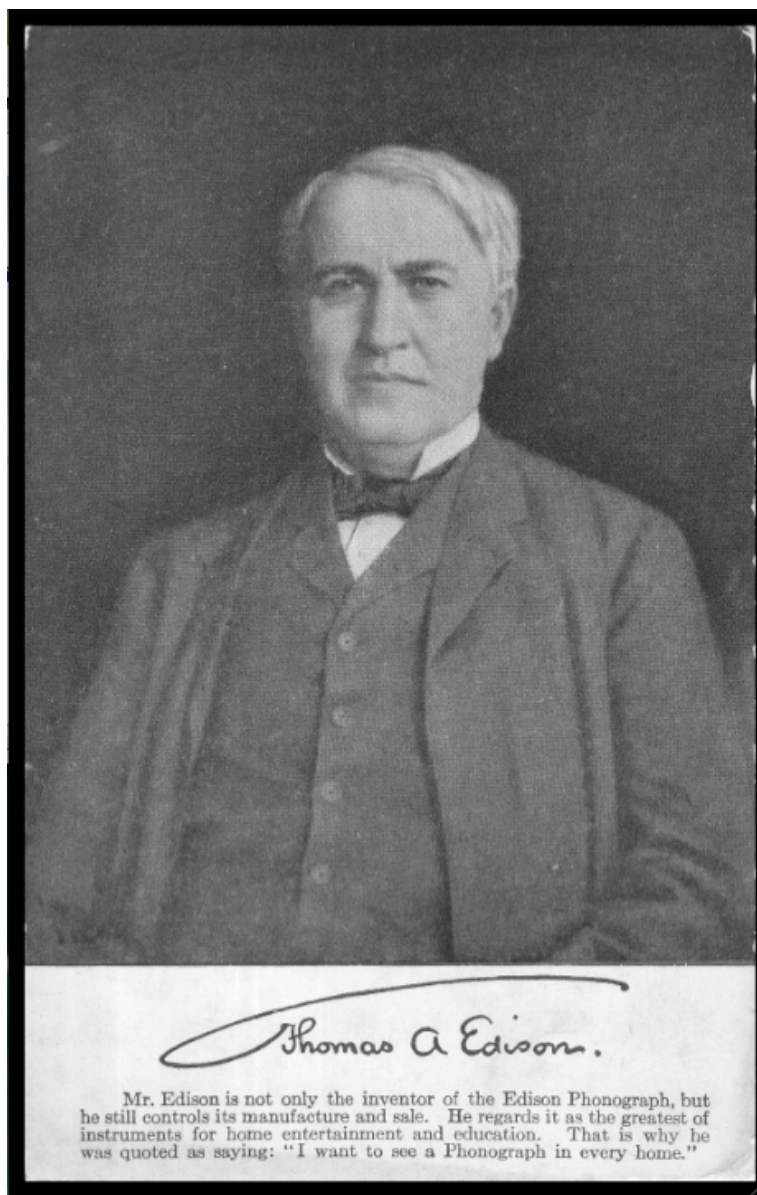


Figure 1. Edison Postcard, courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

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<sup>91</sup> Woodworth, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 22 February 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. There appear to be two initials at the beginning of Woodworth's signature, but they are illegible.

### Birth of the Phonograph

The birth of Edison's "favorite invention" materialized from the culmination of ideas that accumulated over years of experimentation and innovation. While improving upon the telegraph, for instance, Edison found the impetus for the phonograph. He described the telegraph as incorporating "... a disk of paper, the indentations being formed in a volute spiral, exactly as in the disk phonograph to-day. It was this instrument which gave me the idea of the phonograph while working on the telephone."<sup>92</sup>

Edison recounted a story of his work on a toy that further paved the way for the invention of the phonograph. While working on the toy, Edison recognized the effect of sound vibrations upon a diaphragm.<sup>93</sup> The funnel, into which someone would speak loudly, "... work[ed] a pawl connected to the diaphragm; and this engaging a ratchet-wheel served to give continuous rotation to a pulley." The toy, attached to the pulley with a cord, was made of paper that was fashioned to depict a person sawing wood. Consequently, Edison explained, the toy would begin sawing when one yelled, "Mary Had A Little Lamb." With this success, he said, "I reached the conclusion that if I could record the movements of the diaphragm properly, I could cause such record to reproduce the original movements imparted to the diaphragm by the voice, and thus

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<sup>92</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 68.

<sup>93</sup> A diaphragm is a vibrating element that is crucial to the workings of the telegraph and telephone, both of which Edison improved during his career. It was during experiments with the telegraph that Edison heard an "audible note" from a strip of paper with dots and dashes. Dyer and Martin explained that with this information, "... Edison reasoned that if the paper strip could be imprinted with elevations and depressions representative of sound-waves, they might be caused to actuate a diaphragm so as to reproduce the corresponding sounds." See Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 206.

succeed in recording and reproducing the human voice.” Edison did indeed figure out a way to capture and recreate sound. “Instead of using a disk,” he recounted, “I designed a little machine using a cylinder provided with grooves around the surface.”<sup>94</sup>

By positioning tinfoil on the cylinder, Edison knew he could record the motion of the diaphragm without difficulty. He sketched out his idea for the phonograph and the drawing was delivered to John Kruesi,<sup>95</sup> the employee charged with designing the machine. Edison recalled that he himself was not very optimistic about the device functioning, speculating that he “... might possibly hear a word or so that would give hope of a future for the idea.” When Kruesi was close to completing the contraption, he inquired about its purpose to Edison. “I told him I was going to record talking, and then have the machine talk back,” he said. “Absurd,” Kruesi exclaimed, but Edison went ahead with the test, shouting, “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” When his words were repeated back perfectly, the phonograph was born. “I was never so taken aback in my life,” Edison remembered, and “Everybody was astonished.”<sup>96</sup> This surprising and unprecedented incident resulted in a round-the-clock marathon work session. Adjustments were made to the device throughout the night to improve recordings of speaking and singing. As they listened to their voices, Edison and his employees were overcome with “... involuntary awe as the words came back

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 207.

<sup>95</sup> Edison lacked formal training in engineering. He was mainly self-taught and learned mostly through experimenting and reading voraciously. For example, Israel noted on page 37 of his book that Edison had some of his employees, skilled mechanics, make mechanical drawings to scale because he did not have the training to make them.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 208.

again and again, just as long as they were willing to revolve the little cylinder with its dotted spiral indentations in the tinfoil under the vibrating stylus of the reproducing diaphragm."<sup>97</sup>

The next morning Edison decided to unveil his invention. He traveled to New York City where he took the machine into the workplace of the magazine *Scientific American*. The experience Edison described was similar to the initial test he conducted, where he recited the words of the famous nursery rhyme, and, once more, the phonograph repeated them flawlessly. "They kept me at it until the crowd got so great Mr. Beach was afraid the floor would collapse," Edison reminisced.<sup>98</sup> Mr. Beach, the editor of the magazine, remarked: "no matter how familiar a person may be with modern machinery ... it is impossible to listen to the mechanical speech without his experiencing the idea that his senses are deceiving him."<sup>99</sup>

Without delay, Edison began improving his invention by constructing larger machines that were subsequently showcased to spectators at Menlo Park. Dyer and Martin reported that the demand to see the device was so great that special trains were run by the Pennsylvania Railroad to take people to see it. In 1878 Edison even travelled with the device to Washington, D. C., where he demonstrated it to members of Congress and President Rutherford B. Hayes.<sup>100</sup>

Dyer and Martin relayed that Edison and his phonograph were topics of international discourse, as evidenced by the amount of coverage received in the

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<sup>97</sup> Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 208-09.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 209.

<sup>99</sup> Mr. Beach, quoted in DeGraaf, *Historic Photos*, 25.

<sup>100</sup> Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 210.



press from 1878, with the phonograph gaining momentum as a worldwide phenomenon. They went so far as to suggest that the pandemonium over the phonograph inspired legions of people around the globe to experience it.<sup>101</sup>

An instance of the excitement and bewilderment that the phonograph generated was found in the *Paterson Daily Press*, from Paterson, New Jersey. An article entitled “The Phonograph Astonishes Our English Cousins,” which appeared on April 17, 1878, was based on a letter sent to the *Boston Journal* from London. There, the phonograph was deemed “... first cousin to the Prince of the Black Art.” One person testified as having potentially “gone mad” after hearing it. “I looked for a flight of demons, for a Sabbath of witches, and expected to see the devil appear at my elbow, and ask me to sign the traditional contract,” was their response. When it was exhibited at the Langham Hotel in London, the writer said, “It was irrepressibly comical to hear it repeat all the inflections of one’s own voice, to listen to its repetitions of shrill laughter, trills, scales, whistling, shouting, or an operatic air.” Turning doubters into believers, it was said of the phonograph that “... those who come to see it and to scoff remain to wonder.”<sup>102</sup>

The excitement surrounding the phonograph also led to a new type of concert that included a performance, not only by live musicians, but by the phonograph as well. Dyer and Martin claimed that there were endless requests

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 211-12.

<sup>102</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, *Paterson Daily Press*, Wednesday, April 17, 1878, “The Phonograph Astonishes Our English Cousins,” [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=MBSB10500X&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (13 February 2012), TAED, MBSB10500X [Document ID], MBSB1 [Folder ID], Image 169 of 343, Rutgers; Internet. This article is on the left hand page of the scrapbook and is unsigned.

for the phonograph in New York, and concerts featuring the machine were held with the help of Hilborne L. Roosevelt, a first cousin of President Theodore Roosevelt and a well-known organ builder.<sup>103</sup> A program from one of these events included an acknowledgement of Hilborne Roosevelt's construction of the organ used in the concert, which took place in New York City on June 17, 1878. The program also publicized the phonograph as exemplifying "... the latest improvements made by Mr. Edison, and clearly demonstrates that under his wonderfully fertile brain and persistent energy this—his most marvelous invention—is rapidly approaching perfection in all its detail, thus substantiating the claim that human speech may henceforth be permanently retained."<sup>104</sup>

Edison's phonograph was on display at Kurtz's Gallery in April of 1878 in an event similar to the aforementioned concert in New York. The purpose of the showcase was "... to give a practical illustration of and investigation into the principle of Mr. Edison's great discovery in acoustics." It was reported that participants were given the opportunity to record themselves on the phonograph, with some of them choosing to sing and others electing to speak. An announcement ushering in a unique musical collaboration between man and

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<sup>103</sup> Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 213. Dyer and Martin spell Hilborne's name with a "u", although, as may be seen by accessing the program via the link in the next footnote, it seems to be properly spelled without the extra letter. Dyer and Martin furthermore list his relation to President Roosevelt as an uncle, yet the family history suggests the two were first cousins. See Bryan Kent Mock, "Hilborne Lewis Roosevelt: A Survey of his Life and Work" (D.M.A. thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1990), 4-5.

<sup>104</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, "Programme," [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=MBSB10500X&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (13 February 2012), TAED, MBSB10500X [Document ID], MBSB1 [Folder ID], Image 239 of 343, Rutgers; Internet. The program is on the right hand side of the scrapbook.

machine, "... a cornet performance in connection with the phonograph," was incorporated to entice visitors to attend the exhibition.<sup>105</sup>

That same year, 1878, work on the electric light caused Edison to turn his attention away from the phonograph. When he returned to working on the phonograph in the following decade, he manufactured an even better product that, instead of using tin foil as the medium for capturing and reproducing sound, employed a wax cylinder.

In a manner similar to his projected use of the tin foil phonograph for musical purposes, Edison stated that his new phonograph was "going to do wonders" for musicians. He noted in an article entitled "The New Phonograph" that the tin foil machine was known to produce "musical sounds" quite competently: "... the machine would whistle or sing far better than it would talk." Yet, even with his improved phonograph that utilized a wax cylinder, Edison was not satisfied with recording a single voice; he found a way to record an orchestra. "[E]ach instrument can be perfectly distinguished," Edison exulted, "... the violins from the cellos, the wind instruments and the wood are perfectly heard, and even in the notes of a violin the over-tones are distinct to a delicate ear."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, "A Talking Machine: Professor Edison's Phonograph on Exhibition—Experiments at Kurtz's Gallery" [April 1878] [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=SB031087a&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (13 February 2012), TAED, SB031087a [Document ID], SB031 [Folder ID], Image 66 of 69, Rutgers; Internet. The article is on the right hand page of the scrapbook.

<sup>106</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, "The New Phonograph," [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=SM030018b&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (13 February 2012), TAED, SM030018b [Document ID], SM030 [Folder ID], Image 49 of 53, Rutgers; Internet. The article is on the left hand page of the scrapbook.

This improved version of the phonograph was featured in concerts more prominently than its predecessor. A program from 1889 portrayed the phonograph as a performer throughout the concert. It played back recordings of several different types of music by various ensembles such as a trio for mandolin, cornet, and banjo. For this piece, two musicians accompanied the phonograph, which reproduced the cornet part.<sup>107</sup>

### Edison's Thoughts on Music

Although Edison was not a highly trained musician, he was musically erudite and emphatic about his opinions on the topic. In an article that originally appeared in the April 1917 issue of *The Etude* and was reprinted in the May 1917 issue of *Edison Diamond Points*, Edison addressed a number of musical topics, including the violin, opera, the voice, his favorite musical works, and popular musical taste, among others.<sup>108</sup>

In his assessment of the violin, Edison judged it to be an instrument in need of improvement. The highest string bothered him, especially when it was worn. Edison said that a worn E string caused him "great pain," and that violinists continued to play on such a string without being aware of the problems. A violinist named Kathleen Parlow was not convinced, so Edison examined her E string with a microscope and pronounced it "worn square." "It

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<sup>107</sup> "An Evening's Fun with The Edison Phonograph," Program from 1889, Primary Printed—Edison Comp., EDIS—54100, Box 42, Programs, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>108</sup> *The Etude*, "New Aspects of the Art of Music," 35 (April 1917): 225-26, reprinted in *Edison Diamond Points*, "New Aspects of the Art of Music," [n.v.] (May 1917): 12-14.

produced the wrong overtones and the result was simply excruciating to my ears," Edison remembered. Such instances convinced Edison that he could hear differently than others: "I seem to be gifted with a kind of inner hearing which enables me to detect sounds and noises which the ordinary listener does not hear."<sup>109</sup>

Edison was also concerned about octaves on the violin, which he maintained could not be performed perfectly by any violinist based on his scientific evaluation. "It is physically possible to play octaves on the violin correctly," Edison pointed out, "but it is not humanly possible." He clarified that the violinist "... must locate a spot on the string of one-thousandth of an inch," and "... if he strikes the exact spot where the note has just the requisite number of vibrations, he has an area of microscopic dimensions in which to press the string down on the fingerboard." Nevertheless, Edison reasoned that the ear of the performer and the ear of the listener both reacted to the out-of-tune octaves. "The ear of the performer," he described, "with almost miraculous speed, detects any considerable discrepancy, and corrects it by a slight adjustment of the angle of the finger on the string." "On the other hand," Edison explained, "the ear of the auditor that has not been trained in extreme acuteness is satisfied with approximately tuned intervals, and accepts them when heard upon the violin as he has been accustomed [*sic*] to hearing them." Nevertheless, Edison still yearned for the elimination of octaves on the violin from composers' options for the instrument. It was his finding that "... the average fine violinist is likely to play

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<sup>109</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in reprint version, 12.

fifteen or more vibrations, lower or higher, out of the way, in playing octaves.” When executed in this manner, Edison thought “They anticipate Debussy in a way that they will not themselves believe.”<sup>110</sup>

Despite his enthusiasm for opera, Edison recalled just two visits to the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. While there, he was sensitized to the acoustics of the venue, which he thought seemed to be unrecognized by the ordinary listener. “Very few people realize what position in the auditorium really means,” he remarked. Finding it strange that some attendees did not discern the shortcomings of their seat selection, Edison pointed out that “The people who insist upon sitting down in the front rows of the orchestra have their musical impressions seriously distorted.” He argued that, “... [O]ne does not begin to get the blend of the sound that the composer aspired to produce until one is some distance from the stage.” He substantiated his reasoning with a comparison to art: “No sensible person in an art gallery tries to get his nose right up against the canvas in order to enjoy a great painting.” He therefore could not fathom “How people sitting in the front seats at the opera can stand the performance.” “It makes me sick,” he railed. “It is only a badly jumbled mess of instrumental sounds.” “[A]s far away from the stage as one can get,” was Edison’s choice: “... [T]he most desirable position is on the center aisle in the last row of seats.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 12-13. According to Andrey Kasparov, Edison probably was referring to the parallelisms in Debussy’s music, especially sevenths and ninths in parallel chords. Andrey Kasparov, Skype interview by author, May 30, 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in “New Aspects,” reprint version, 12.

Edison mentioned listening to a large number of singers from various countries. He concluded that the best vocalists were from the United States, calling it “the land of fine voices.” “Of course we haven’t a complete monopoly of all the great voices in the world,” he acknowledged, “but the number of fine voices possessed by Americans is a continual marvel to me.” Edison based this conclusion on his employment of “trained investigators,” who searched for European vocal talent over a two-year period. He found the outcome to be “... very disappointing in comparison with the results obtained in America right at our very thresholds.”<sup>112</sup>

With his reported record collection of 2,200 different singers and his frequent attendance at recording sessions, Edison heard many vocalists and formed some strong opinions about the voice: “The worst defect a voice can have is, in my mind, the tremolo.” He thought it to be “... a defect which singers themselves do not seem to be able to recognize.” He himself, though, was very sensitive to this aspect of singing. Edison told the story of how listening to a recording persuaded a noted vocalist of the shortcoming. “The tremolo came out very distinctly in the record and the singer insisted that it was due to the mechanism,” he remarked. Knowing the truth of the matter, Edison used a different mechanism that “... revealed the tremolo so clearly that the singer was convinced where the fault lay and proceeded to correct it.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. This was an early instance of a musician engaging in self-instruction through the use of a mechanical device that could record and play back sound. Also, it seems that when Edison mentioned “tremolo,” he was referring to vibrato.

Edison recognized the importance of quality musical instruction. His comments about the voice and preference for singing without vibrato included several mentions of technical terms that showed his knowledge of music. “A beautiful voice,” he said, “without tremolo, trained by a fine musician so that through proper accentuations, phrasing, etc., it can bring out the composer’s proper meaning, is truly the finest of musical instruments.” Edison also stressed that the singer needed to “... have something more than a mere voice. She must have brains of a high order.” According to him, vocalists in the United States possessed “splendid brains,” having “... too much grey matter to let fool teachers lead them astray.” “Vocal teachers are often the worst of humbugs,” he said. “They seek to do absolutely impossible things, and become indignant if their pupils cannot do them.” Edison was confident that he could provide “... better vocal lessons than many of them, just by using a little common sense.” He was dismayed by the thought “... of a basso profundo,” for instance, “teaching a coloratura soprano how to sing a high note!” He compared it to “... the elephant teaching the nightingale.” Edison’s suggestion for “The singing pupil aspiring to create a fine tone” was to “... hear the finest voices of her class and then strive to do a great deal better.” “But don’t advertise me as a vocal teacher,” he insisted; “I have a few other things to do.”<sup>114</sup>

The subject of musical taste arose in the article, and Edison’s opinions on the topic revealed his thoughts about some well-known composers and his contempt for the conventional. “People like or dislike what they are told to,”

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.



Edison remarked. “The dictum of the professional musician is taken as final,” he decried, “until some revolutionist like Wagner throws it over.” Edison used Mozart as an example of the scorn one would receive for breaking with conventional thought:

To me Mozart is one of the least melodic of the composers—that is, he shows the least invention—far less to my mind than Bellini, Rossini, Donizetti and Verdi. I am not speaking about his craftsmanship but about his sense of melodic invention. Still, were I to utter this thought in the presence of the professional musician I would be rewarded with a smile of derision. They would intimate that there was something wrong with my discernment—yet they would not comment when I told them that my favorite symphony was the incomparable Beethoven Ninth.<sup>115</sup>

Besides these composers, Edison mentioned the solo violin rendition of “Ave Maria” by Gounod-Bach as a string favorite and that “Kathleen Mavourneen” was his ballad of choice. He ended the discussion of his cherished works by noting that “Great names, big reputations, mean nothing to me—it is the music itself that appeals to me.”<sup>116</sup>

Based on a sales analysis of 126 million recordings, Edison drew conclusions about consumers’ musical preferences. “Popular taste in music is pretty well defined,” he determined: “The public likes music of a certain kind and goes on liking it year after year.” Edison stated that for the most part people

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. Despite being one of Beethoven’s most performed symphonies and notwithstanding the fame of the “Ode to Joy” chorus, this work has been criticized as substandard by some musicians. Musicologist Philip G. Downs wrote: “The problem of the Ninth lies in Beethoven’s determination to reach out to embrace mankind in a bearhug of brotherhood, using an idealistic text to preach the unmistakeable [*sic*] message, and a choir of human voices to realize it: here the medium, the choir and the orchestra on stage, literally is the message,” from *Classical Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 618.

<sup>116</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in “New Aspects,” reprint version, 13. Edison expressed his opinions on music pedagogy and taste on several occasions. They appeared in other literature and seem to have affected customers in both good and bad ways.

were gravitating in the direction of “better music.” This preference was not to be confused with “complicated or eccentric music”:

I cannot conceive that music like that of the extremists will ever meet with very great favor at any time in the future. It seems to me like music that anyone could make. By what art principles are such musical jumbles justified? They sound like interrupted conversations. One is just about to say something of interest when he is foolishly interrupted with some entirely different thought. Insane people blabber on in such fashion. Such a work as the Sextet from “Lucia” is a masterpiece beside much of the idiotic stuff we hear in these days as “modern” music. It is like the cubist pictures which look as though someone had accidentally upset a pot of paint on the canvas.<sup>117</sup>

Edison also applied an analytical approach to melodies, the creation of which he considered to be “... one of the most difficult things in music.” After an investigation of 2,700 waltz themes he ordered, he concluded that, “In the final analysis they consisted of about 43 themes, worked over in various ways.” He named Johann Strauss the “... most inventive of all waltz composers. He had the real melodic gift.” Edison made sure to mention that he did not take into account the waltzes of Chopin, since he deemed them to be unconventional. “Chopin had a wonderful melodic gift—marvelous,” he thought. “Nevertheless his ‘Funeral March,’ by which he is known to most people, seems to me greatly inferior to the Beethoven funeral march.” Edison thought it probable that Beethoven’s funeral march was the catalyst for Chopin’s contribution to the genre.<sup>118</sup>

As a result of his recording endeavors, Edison amassed a sizeable amount of sheet music. Archivist Calvin Elliker traced the history of this sheet music

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 13-14. It is probable that Edison was referring to the pre-serial compositional expansions of the emerging Second Viennese School and other national schools of composition.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 14. Edison seems to have been referring to the structural similarities between Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata No. 12 in A-flat major*, Op. 26 and Chopin’s *Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor*, Op. 35. For more information on Beethoven’s influence on Chopin, see Wayne C. Petty, “Chopin and the Ghost of Beethoven,” *19th-Century Music* 22 (spring 1999): 281-99.

stockpile and how it arrived at the University of Michigan in his “Guide To The Microfilm Collection.” Edison had the collection shipped to Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, and Ford gave it to a relative who had it placed in storage at Swartz Creek depot [Michigan] for approximately forty years. The depot was purchased by Bly Corning in 1963, and he decided to sell the majority of the materials in 1987. After some years of unsuccessful fundraising by the University of Michigan’s School of Music, an anonymous donor supplied the necessary capital and the collection was moved to the university in 1990.<sup>119</sup>

Elliker described The Thomas A. Edison Collection of American Sheet Music as a “... remarkable body of publications assembled from roughly 1896 to 1920 by Thomas Alva Edison to support the activities of his phonograph company.”<sup>120</sup> Harry Dichter appraised the collection in 1963, determining it to be a significant discovery and valued it at \$8,500.<sup>121</sup>

### **Edison’s Musical Tastes**

In an effort to inform the public about Edison’s musical preferences, Thomas A. Edison, Inc. released a pamphlet entitled “What Edison Likes in Music.” The contents of the booklet included an interview with Edison and a list of his twenty-five most cherished recordings (see table 1). Edison thought his tastes were similar to those of the general public, even though he said that his

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<sup>119</sup> Calvin Elliker, “Early Imprints in The Thomas A. Edison Collection of American Sheet Music: Addenda to Sonneck-Upton and to Wolfe,” (2000): i-vi. See also “Early Imprints in the Thomas A. Edison Collection of American Sheet Music: Addenda to Sonneck-Upton and to Wolfe,” *Notes*, Second Series, Vol. 57, No. 3 (March 2001): 555-73.

<sup>120</sup> Elliker, “Early Imprints in The Thomas A. Edison Collection of American Sheet Music,” i-ii.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

“... abnormal hearing might cause [him] to have different standards of judgment and different tastes in regard to music than would be true of the average person.”<sup>122</sup> A number of recordings indicated by many respondents to the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaire, however, matched Edison’s choices, such as those of W. E. Slocum included later in this chapter.

Table 1  
Edison’s Twenty-Five Favorite Musical Recordings

<i>Selection</i>	<i>Composer</i>	<i>Arrangement</i>	<i>Performer(s)</i>	<i>Catalog No.</i>
Ain’t You Coming Out To-Night	Blanke-Belcher	...	Arthur Collins and Byron G. Harlan	(50045)
Anvil Chorus–Il Trovatore	Verdi	...	New York Light Opera Company	(82516)
Ave Maria	Schubert-Wilhelmj	Violin	Carl Flesch	(82063)
Ave Maria	Bach-Gounod	Soprano with violin obbligato	Charlotte Kirwan and Isidore Moskowitz	(80290)
Bloom Is On the Rye	Bishop	Tenor and Baritone	John Young and Frederick Wheeler	(80072)
Call Me Your Darling Again	Skelly	Soprano	Elizabeth Spencer and Chorus	(80098)
Carry Me Back to Old Virginny	Bland	Baritone	Thomas Chalmers and Chorus	(80055)
Depuis le jour (E’er since the day)–Louise	Charpentier	Soprano, in French	Anna Case	(82077)
Forest Whispers	Losey	...	Reed Orchestra	(50066)
Forgotten	Cowles	Baritone	Thomas Chalmers	(50069)
Hear Me, Norma–Norma	Bellini	Flute and Clarinet	Julius Spindler and Anthony Giammatto	(80063)
I’ll Take You Home Again, Kathleen	Westendorf	Tenor	Walter Van Brunt and Chorus	(80160)
In the Evening By the Moonlight, Dear Louise	H. Von Tilzer	Tenor	Harvey Hindermeyer and Chorus	(82510)

<sup>122</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interviewed in Thomas A. Edison, Inc., “What Edison Likes in Music” (Orange, NJ), [n.d.]: 3; archived on Nipperhead, [website]; available from <http://www.nipperhead.com/old/welim.htm>, accessed on 23 November 2011; Internet. This pamphlet appeared sometime before 1921, as Edison’s favorite recordings in this document were referenced by a respondent to the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaire of 1921 (see W. E. Slocum’s response in this chapter).

<i>Selection</i>	<i>Composer</i>	<i>Arrangement</i>	<i>Performer(s)</i>	<i>Catalog No.</i>
Jolly Fellows Waltz	Vollstedt	...	American Symphony Orchestra	(50091)
Kathleen Mavourneen	Crouch	Violin, Violoncello, Flute and Harp	Venetian Instrumental Quartet	(82032)
La Paloma – Spanish Serenade	Yradier	...	American Symphony Orchestra	(80063)
Lucy Anna Lou	Edwards	...	Arthur Collins and Byron G. Harlan	(50045)
Ma Lady Lu	Brill	...	Walter Van Brunt and Chorus	(50055)
Memories of Home	Gutmann	Violin, Violoncello, Flute and Harp	Venetian Instrumental Quartet	(50061)
Miserere–Il Trovatore	Verdi	Soprano and Tenor	Agnes Kimball, Charles Harrison and Chorus	(82516)
O, That We Two Were Maying	A. M. Smith	Soprano and Baritone	Elizabeth Spencer and Thomas Chalmers	(82510)
Rocked In the Cradle of the Deep	Knight	Bass	Frank Croxton and Chorus	(80072)
Rondo Capriccioso	Saint-Saëns	Violin	Albert Spalding	(82043)
When I'm Gone You'll Soon Forget	Keith	Tenor and Contralto	Walter Van Brunt and Helen Clark	(80411)
William Tell Overture, Parts I and II	Rossini	...	Sodero's Band	(80128)

Consistent with the views he expressed in the 1917 issue of *Edison Diamond Points* discussed earlier in this chapter, Edison professed to have a “very sensitive inner ear” that enabled him to hear things that an ordinary listener did not, such as “... minute overtones, which are so small that they cannot be seen through a microscope, unless it is specially equipped.”<sup>123</sup> Edison noted his sensitivity to “discordant sounds” as well and did not like it when composers

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<sup>123</sup> Edison seemed to be in the habit of examining recordings with a microscope, whereby he could determine voice quality: “By carefully examining in my laboratory the records made by singers, ... I can readily count the overtones in a voice—and it is the overtones which make the richness of a singer’s vocal organ.” [Author unknown], “Best Voice in the World,” *Poverty Bay Herald* 40 (October 3, 1913), 5 [website]; available from <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=PBH19131003.2.98&e=-----10--1----0-->, accessed on 19 June 2012; Internet.

employed dissonances exorbitantly. "I realized, of course, that dissonance has its uses in the development of a musical theme, and, if properly employed, tends to enlarge the scope of musical expression, but dissonance, merely for the sake of dissonance, impressed me as a debased form of composition, and I wondered how anyone could like music of that character."<sup>124</sup>

Edison centered on the performer next and was concerned with expression being overemphasized to the neglect of seemingly obvious matters. "'There is really a lot of buncombe foisted on to the public, in the guise of interpretation,'" he said. He discussed an instance where a pianist communicated his "appreciation of certain delicate interpretive shadings," yet was unable to perceive the volume differential that resulted from a defective string. Edison believed it was because of his unique aural acuity, resulting from his impaired hearing, that he was able to recognize the volume discrepancy. "I realize that I can detect gradations of volume, which would be lost upon a person with normal hearing," he said, "yet you would nevertheless think that a man who prided himself on the finer effects of interpretation would be able to observe such a glaring defect in a piano...."<sup>125</sup>

The question of music's influence on children arose in the brochure. It was suggested to Edison that "... if children are given unlimited opportunity to hear really good music, that they will, in time, form a taste for it, just as they form a taste for good literature, if they are given an opportunity to read good books."

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3. <sup>124</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "What Edison Likes,"

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 4.

However, he was of the opinion that this varied from individual to individual. The author of the brochure held the view that musical taste would only improve, "... provided sufficient music is heard, but it is quite characteristic of Mr. Edison, that he will not accept a theory, without pointing out that there must necessarily be exceptions to it."<sup>126</sup>

The pamphlet concluded with a reader response section for Edison collectors, the goal of which was to encourage the submission of potential candidates whose favorite Edison RE-CREATIONS<sup>127</sup> would also be identified. "What man, or woman, in the world do you admire most," the pamphlet asked, "and whose tastes in music would interest you most?" Readers were steered away from submitting the names of only "great musicians"—it was thought that their preferences would "... probably not be of much interest, as it would be too largely influenced by his, or her, ability to sing, or play, a given selection." Individual tastes of those such as "a great statesman, a great author, or a great captain of industry" were sought, as their choices were thought to be potentially more relatable.<sup>128</sup>

W. E. Slocum was one person inspired by the pamphlet to compose a letter that has been preserved in the collection at the University of Michigan. "I must say I like Mr. Edison's judgment," he wrote, "so far as it has been my good

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<sup>126</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "What Edison Likes," 6. The person who interviewed Edison did not reveal his or her identity.

<sup>127</sup> RE-CREATION was a term used by Thomas A. Edison, Inc. to differentiate Edison company recordings from those of other companies. It was reasoned that this choice of words accurately reflected how an artist's performance was realistically reproduced by an Edison recording in comparison to the alleged inferior quality of the recordings made by the company's competitors.

<sup>128</sup> Thomas A. Edison, interview, quoted in Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "What Edison Likes," 15.

fortune to obtain duplicates of the twenty-five mentioned [recordings] in the list of his favorites."<sup>129</sup> In another response, W. C. Lloyd expressed pleasure with his phonograph and all of his recordings. He estimated that the performance of his own machine was responsible for inspiring the sale of fifteen to twenty other phonographs. Lloyd's only argument against purchasing Edison's merchandise concerned the timeliness of "producing new song hits." He wrote, "Your artists are good but give us some new stuff."<sup>130</sup>

In response to Lloyd's request, William Maxwell, vice president of Thomas A. Edison, Inc., communicated, "... I am very glad to be able to tell you that we are making a very much better showing, in the issuance of hits." He noted that a number of pieces released by the company were out before the "talking machine people" could make them available. Maxwell assured Lloyd that "... with the installation of a special department, now nearly completed, for handling hits, I think you will be more than pleased with our speed." He asked Mr. Lloyd to hold the company accountable in this regard by keeping in touch with his Edison dealer.<sup>131</sup>

The speed at which hits were issued also distressed Floyd Reeve. "I have friends who come home now and then with a pack of new Victor records for

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<sup>129</sup> W. E. Slocum, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 16 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. Slocum included a list of his twenty-five favorite recordings, six of which were on Edison's list: (1) "When I'm Gone You'll Soon Forget," (2) "I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen," (3) Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," (4) "Hear Me Norma," (5) "La Paloma," and (6) "Memories of Home."

<sup>130</sup> Mrs. W. C. Lloyd, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 3 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>131</sup> William Maxwell, response to Mrs. W. C. Lloyd's questionnaire, 11 April 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.



their Victor machine," he contended, "but what have we Edison owners to choose from? Two or three new re-creations in a month perhaps!" His complaint regarding selection went hand-in-hand with another frustration: artists. "Many of your artists are scarcely known," he protested.<sup>132</sup> Mrs. J. L. Mead also found fault with Edison's roster of artists: "Most of the noted and popular artists are exclusively on the Victrola." Mrs. Mead divulged that one of her friends had purchased an expensive Victrola on account of her family's desire for "records of the noted artists."<sup>133</sup>

Maxwell took exception to Mrs. Mead's assessment. "We consider that we have the grandest collection of female voices in the world," he retorted. While Maxwell felt similarly in regard to Edison's male artists, he acknowledged the desire to "strengthen" the lineup in "one or two particulars." Maxwell furthermore explained that World War I had disrupted a number of Edison's "very fine plans." He discussed the voice trials in Europe that were amassed, over two thousand of them, and how the war had prevented a number of singers from making the trip to the United States. "Part of those, who are left, will come sooner, or later," Maxwell reasoned, "but, of course, our plans were spoiled."<sup>134</sup>

Maxwell provided some insight into artists' contracts in his response to Mrs. Mead. "Most of the other manufacturers are loaded up with exclusive

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<sup>132</sup> Floyd Reeve, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, [1921], collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>133</sup> Mrs. J. L. Mead, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 14 January 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>134</sup> William Maxwell, response to Mrs. J. L. Mead's questionnaire, 20 January 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

contracts, to an extent, which makes it difficult for them to do justice to their artists," he elucidated, "and there is great dissatisfaction among the artists." Maxwell believed that Edison was "... in a better position than some of the others to offer an artist an attractive contract, and, during the next year or so ... you will find many of the most desirable artists enlisting under the Edison banner."<sup>135</sup>

### **Mechanical Music**

Preceding the phonograph's entrance into the home and school were other mechanical devices designed to reproduce music. The player piano was among the most popular of these machine-driven apparatuses, and its acceptance into the home helped prepare consumers for the phonograph; not everyone, though, welcomed the player piano. The stigma of mechanical music was something that Emily Thompson addressed in "Machines, Music, and The Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877-1925," wherein she observed that certain manufacturers of player pianos sought to change this perception. Thompson included an advertisement for a player piano that, for example, touted the control exerted by the operator: "The Artronome puts the technical skill of the artist at your command; it is you who provide the interpretation."<sup>136</sup>

While the ability to interpret may have preserved an aspect of human control in the musical experience, it was not enough to stop what Travis Suttle

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Thompson, "Machines, Music, and The Quest for Fidelity," 166 (note 49). Since the mechanical components were part of an actual musical instrument that could be played and that left some control over the performance in the hands of the user, this goal was somewhat more attainable than with the phonograph.

Rivers described in his dissertation as an important shift in musical involvement that was emerging as a result of the player piano and other devices. He noted that the traditional experience of interacting with music in the home via singing or playing an instrument was being transformed conceptually into a product-based commodity as a result of musical instruments being equipped with newly designed machinery that removed some or all of the human element, case in point, the player piano. He also recognized that ensuing apparatuses such as the phonograph, and later radio, movies, and television, increased the shift away from the traditional production of music as a uniquely human engagement.<sup>137</sup>

The idea of music as a commodity that reduced traditional musical involvement and proficiency was attractive to many critics, the best known of whom was John Philip Sousa. In Sousa's widely read article, "The Menace of Mechanical Music," which came out in 1906, he expressed his concerns about machine-made music subverting human expression: "Sweeping across the country with the speed of a transient fashion in slang ... comes now the mechanical device to sing for us a song or play for us a piano, in substitute for human skill, intelligence, and soul." Content with being labeled an "alarmist" and motivated to an extent by "personal interest," Sousa anticipated a noticeable "... deterioration in American music and musical taste, an interruption in the

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<sup>137</sup> Travis Suttle Rivers, "The Etude Magazine: A Mirror of the Genteel Tradition in American Music" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1974), 234.

musical development of the country, and a host of other injuries to music in its artistic manifestations," in addition to violations of intellectual property rights.<sup>138</sup>

One of Sousa's main arguments centered on the notion of lack of "soul" in mechanical music. "... [T]he whole course of music, from its first day to this," he contended, "has been along the line of making it the expression of soul states; in other words, of pouring into it soul." He was troubled by the thought of expression in music being diminished to mathematics and machinery. Sousa reasoned that the musical reproductions by "... mathematical system[s] of megaphones, wheels, cogs, disks, cylinders, and all manner of revolving things" were incomparable to human manifestations of music, noting mechanical music to be "... as like real art as the marble statue of Eve is like her beautiful, living, breathing daughters."<sup>139</sup>

Another line of reasoning Sousa employed focused on what he thought would be the debilitating effects of the extinction of the amateur musician. With machines designed to replicate music, which he thought would replace traditional musical instruments in the home, Sousa thought it "... simply a question of time when the amateur disappears entirely, and with him a host of vocal and instrumental teachers." This fear was also held by some in other countries. Sousa quoted a sympathetic writer from Great Britain who also

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<sup>138</sup> John Philip Sousa, "The Menace of Mechanical Music," *Appleton's Magazine* 8 (September 1906): 278.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

thought that the phonograph would function “... as a mechanical substitute for amateur performances.”<sup>140</sup>

These objections led to the emergence of a derogatory term for mechanical music. Sousa wrote:

[T]he ingenious purveyor of canned music is urging the sportsman, on his way to the silent places with gun and rod, tent and canoe, to take with him some disks, cranks, and cogs to sing to him as he sits by the firelight, a thought as unhappy and incongruous as canned salmon by a trout brook.<sup>141</sup>

A byproduct of his juxtaposition of food and music, Sousa’s sharp-witted phrase “canned music” was designed to differentiate the experience of a live performance from that of a recorded performance.

The idea of mechanical music as being soulless was an assertion Edison tried to combat in his writings about the phonograph. In a piece of promotional material for an improved phonograph with Edison’s latest refinements, “The New Edison” was marketed as “The Phonograph with a Soul.” It was said to reproduce the music of artists so realistically that it “... would actually re-create the wondrous voices of splendid artists, the various instruments of the musician and the assembled orchestra, band and symphony.”<sup>142</sup>

In a different type of campaign, “The New Edison,” again being hailed as “The Phonograph with a Soul,” was tested in an experiment that paired an artist performing a piece live in simultaneity with a recording of the same work, by the

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 280. Sousa did not fully cite the source containing the thoughts of this British writer. He did, however, mention that they were drawn from an editorial in the London *Spectator*.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>142</sup> “The New Edison: ‘The Phonograph with a Soul,’” [pamphlet], [n.d.], p. 2, The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonographs, Gen. Info., Box 1 of 3, Folder “Edison,” NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

same artist, reproduced on the phonograph. Known as a tone test, the goal was to convince audiences and critics that the machine “re-created” vocal or instrumental performances so faithfully that, if they kept their eyes closed shut, they would be unable to detect any aural difference when that same artist stopped performing and the phonograph continued to play the recorded performance.<sup>143</sup>

While Sousa’s judgments about mechanical music resonated with detractors, others came to the defense of mechanical musical reproductions. The topic reappeared in *Appleton’s Magazine* when responses to Sousa’s article were published. One of the respondents, Paul H. Cromelin, argued that “... the opportunity of listening repeatedly to the phrasing and expression of great artists ...” was an “incalculable benefit” for a person with musical talent. He believed that recordings of “high-class” music yielded “... great educational results, affording to gifted persons in remote places and of slender means the extraordinary advantage of singing lessons from the greatest living artists.” Cromelin crafted a clever alteration of Sousa’s article title when he asked: “Can we pay too great a tribute to the genius in the invention which makes it possible to bottle up this wine of music and song inexhaustible, and should we not offer up our thanks for ‘The Blessing of Mechanical Music’?”<sup>144</sup>

Portions of Sousa’s *Appleton’s Magazine* article were reprinted verbatim in a 1906 issue of *The Etude*. The piece entitled “Does the Machine in Music

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<sup>143</sup> See Thompson, “Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity,” 148-56; and George L. Frow, *The Edison Disc Phonographs and the Diamond Discs* (Kent, Great Britain: Sevenoaks, 1982), 236-42.

<sup>144</sup> Paul H. Cromelin, “The Menace of Mechanical Music: Some of the Replies Evoked by Mr. Sousa’s Article,” *Appleton’s Magazine* 8 (November 1906): 639-40.

Threaten Musical Art?" also contained the thoughts of N. J. Corey and Rupert Hughes. Corey concentrated on the importance of listening in his reply, reckoning "self-playing instruments" served as somewhat of a "preparatory school in musical listening." He supported the Victor Talking Machine for this type of training, and he surmised it incorrect to label the device a "... mechanical instrument, for the sound produced is not mechanical. It is more properly an instrument for preserving sound." Hughes articulated that critics of mechanical music failed to account for how much the arts, in general, are indebted to technology when he remarked, "Art owes more to machinery than many artists are willing to admit." He contended that the camera, for example, suffered similar ignominy from the artistic community, claiming that it had "... done more to spread a knowledge and love of great painting, great sculpture, and great architecture, than all the lectures, books and copies ever made."<sup>145</sup>

Despite Sousa's criticisms of the phonograph early on, before too long he embraced the medium and even became an Edison artist. In the July 1909 issue of the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, approximately three years after his article in *Appleton's Magazine* appeared, a writer reported: "Mr. Sousa has been more or less opposed to talking machines and this arrangement indicates a decided change in his attitude."<sup>146</sup> Some fourteen years later, in 1923, a conversation between Sousa and Edison was organized and described in a special fortieth-year

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<sup>145</sup> N. J. Corey, Rupert Hughes, and J. P. Sousa, "Does the Machine in Music Threaten Musical Art?", *The Etude* 24 (1906): 672, 680.

<sup>146</sup> National Phonograph Company, "Mr. Sousa Also Joins the Edison Forces," [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 7 (July 1909): 3, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

anniversary installment of *The Etude*. “A Momentous Musical Meeting” was the title of the article that spotlighted the two luminaries billed as “America’s Most Famous Musician” and “America’s Most Famous Inventor.”<sup>147</sup>

The two men were likeminded in several musical matters, as for instance their love of melody. Sousa drew attention to Beethoven’s “melody first” mentality and his masterful ability to develop themes. After agreeing with Sousa, Edison steered the conversation toward what he reasoned to be a lack of melodic originality, in spite of a plethora of opportunities for fresh material.

“‘Commander Sousa,’ he said, ‘very few real tunes are ever created’.” Edison was dumbfounded by such a dearth, especially in light of the mathematical analysis his son performed, who estimated “... the number of possible changes from which tunes could be made” to be approximately 400 million. Sousa’s reaction to Edison’s information was that indeed the melodic possibilities were “infinite.”<sup>148</sup>

The only point of contention between the two men involved their opinions regarding Mozart. In keeping with his criticism recorded earlier in this chapter, Edison expressed to Sousa: “Somehow I have never cared for Chopin and Mozart; whereas I am devoted to Wagner.” Edison’s esteem for Wagner’s music was something to which Sousa related, yet he could not concur with respect to

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<sup>147</sup> Cooke, “A Momentous Musical Meeting,” 663.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas A. Edison and John Philip Sousa, interview, quoted in Cooke, “A Momentous Musical Meeting,” 663. According to his son, Edison dabbled in composition: “Now and then he would sit down and compose, for his own enjoyment, by combining a few chords with some simple melody.” Charles Edison, “My Father and Music,” *The Etude* 65 (February 1947): 80, 113.



Mozart, whose works provided him “keen delight.” “Well,” Edison responded, “I cannot explain it; but I have never cared for Mozart.”<sup>149</sup>

Sousa then asked whether Edison judged the ear or the eye to be of greater importance to education. In his empirical fashion, Edison referenced that because light moved more rapidly than sound, he regarded the eye of more importance. He noted that his work in the field of motion pictures, whose importance he projected would in the future surpass that of books, influenced his views. “Children don’t need many books; when they are shown how to do things,” Edison stated, an idea he may have picked up from John Dewey and other progressive educators of the day.<sup>150</sup> “They can learn more by certain kinds of moving pictures in five minutes,” he estimated, “than they can by the usual kinds of books in five hours.” His forward-thinking mind led him to forecast the possibilities of the maturing motion picture and music amalgam:

The combination of music and motion pictures is tremendous, epoch-making. Its expansion, through the introduction of fine symphony orchestras in the great motion picture houses, is but the natural development of the age. The effect of such a combination is nothing short of tremendous. It is one of the most powerful influences for good in our commonwealth. Let us hope and pray that it may always be in the hands of people who will realize their responsibilities to mankind and to posterity.<sup>151</sup>

Small differences aside, Sousa’s recognition of the importance of Edison’s invention can be seen in his remark: “You have made the art of the musician

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<sup>149</sup> Thomas A. Edison and John Philip Sousa, interview, quoted in Cooke, “A Momentous Musical Meeting,” 664.

<sup>150</sup> Edison’s comment is consistent with Dewey’s philosophy of learning that was summarized by Abeles, Hoffer, and Klotman to have an “experience-centered emphasis.” See Harold F. Abeles, Charles R. Hoffer and Robert H. Klotman *Foundations of Music Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), 73. See also the section entitled “Progressive Education” in the prologue of this document.

<sup>151</sup> Edison, interview, quoted in Cooke, “A Momentous Musical Meeting,” 664.

immortal, Mr. Edison, by preserving the interpretations of the great performers.”<sup>152</sup>

### Conclusions

Thomas Alva Edison transformed much more than the teaching and learning of music with his phonograph. His device provided entirely new ways for people to hear and otherwise interact with sound. The interpretations of respected musical artists could now be preserved and repeated, the value of which John Philip Sousa knew well. While Edison was not a professional musician, he was fluent in musical terminology and was an avid listener; moreover, his opinionated thoughts on the subject reflected a connoisseurship with the art form. Edison’s musical tastes encompassed both classical and popular styles of music, and his favorite selections influenced others to listen to recordings in both of these categories.

Edison was not impressed by the reputations of big names, a belief that his competitors ultimately capitalized upon to the detriment of his own phonograph company; quality of tone and phrasing, for instance, were more important to him. Although criticized for giving the world “canned” music, Edison improved the sound quality of the phonograph several times during his career. As an important advocate for music, it should come as no surprise that the most prolific, and arguably the greatest, inventor in history, who considered the phonograph his own favorite invention, stated this about the discipline:

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<sup>152</sup> Sousa, interview, quoted in *ibid.*

“Music, next to religion, is the mind’s greatest solace, and also its greatest inspiration. The history of the world shows that lofty aspirations find vent in music, and that music, in turn, helps to inspire such aspirations in others.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Thomas A. Edison, quoted in *Edison and Music*, [pamphlet], [n.d.], p. 13, The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonographs, General Info., Box 1 of 3, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

## CHAPTER II

### CONTRIBUTIONS OF EDISON'S PHONOGRAPH BUSINESSES TO MUSIC EDUCATION

*Does the boy play the banjo, the guitar or the mandolin? Let him make a record and find in it not only a source of amusement to others when he is not at home, but a means of learning better how to play these instruments. Does the girl take piano lessons? Her instructor will gladly assist her in making a record, or better yet, play the piano as it should be played, and then let the record thus made by the Phonograph be her guide to further practice.*

—Edison Phonograph Monthly<sup>154</sup>

Edison's inventions spawned a huge range and number of associated businesses, some owned by Edison himself and some by others. Even the extent of his personal phonograph businesses and other companies that sold his phonographs and phonographic-related merchandise was vast. Consequently, this investigation focused primarily on his two best-known phonograph enterprises, the National Phonograph Company and Thomas A. Edison, Inc.<sup>155</sup>

Edison's son, Charles, who eventually became the governor of New Jersey, later explained, in an article published in *The Etude*, how one of these businesses originated. He expressed his belief that the year his father founded the National Phonograph Company, 1896, was the point when the "musical phonograph business" truly began.<sup>156</sup> Dyer and Martin added that from its

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<sup>154</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "Home Recording a Strong Feature," [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 11 (August 1913): 10-11, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>155</sup> Relationships between some of these businesses and Edison dealers were also examined, especially as they related to music education.

<sup>156</sup> Charles Edison, "My Father and Music," 65. Charles Edison explained that The North American Phonograph Company previously had the right to sell his father's phonograph. This company eventually deteriorated, and Edison purchased it to form the National Phonograph Company. Prior to The North American Phonograph Company, the rights to sell the phonograph

inception, the National Phonograph Company “... determined to retire at least temporarily from the field of stenographic use, and to exploit the phonograph for musical purposes as a competitor of the music-box.”<sup>157</sup>

### *Edison Phonograph Monthly*

The *Edison Phonograph Monthly* was first published by the National Phonograph Company and later by Thomas A. Edison, Inc. to provide Edison dealers with information about product updates, stories concerning the use of the phonograph, talking points with which to engage customers, and items of general interest. Distributed from 1903 to 1916, this periodical addressed such topics as the recording feature of the Edison phonograph, the Edison School Phonograph, and the many ways the phonograph was being and could be utilized to facilitate music instruction. It also ran reprints of articles from other publications that dealers could show to potential customers.

There was a humorous story, reprinted from *Popular Magazine* in the May 1905 issue of the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, about an amateur musician who heard a recording of himself for the first time. In this account entitled “Heard Himself As Others Hear Him,” a sales attendant noticed a potential customer carrying a flute and encouraged him to give the recording feature a try. The amateur agreed, and the salesperson played back the recording. The flutist then

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were held by the Edison Phonograph Company, which was formed around the time the improved wax cylinder phonograph came into being in the late 1880s.

<sup>157</sup> Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, 222. It is important to note that the Victor Talking Machine Company was not founded until 1901; therefore, the National Phonograph Company did not compete with Victor when it focused on using the phonograph for reproducing music commercially before the turn of the century.

asked, “Is that an exact reproduction of my music’?” Acknowledging this to be the case, the sales attendant asked the prospective buyer if he would like to make a purchase. “No’,” the disheartened flutist replied, “But I’ll sell the flute’.”<sup>158</sup>

In contrast to this amateur’s discouraging experience, other people used the recording feature of the phonograph to improve their musicianship. The work of the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, for example, was highlighted in the June 1911 issue. The author of “To Teach Vocal Music with the Phonograph” included a description of how a teacher incorporated the phonograph as an aid to the instructional process in a vocal lesson. It was reported that the teacher would send the pupil a recording of himself or herself singing a song. The student would then listen to the recording, follow along with the score, and examine the teacher’s instructions. Afterwards, the student would use an Edison blank cylinder to record his or her performance of the song and then mail it to the teacher. Upon arrival, it was then noted that the teacher “... [criticized] the student’s work, [made] suggestions, etc., and [wrote] a letter embracing them, which, in time, [found] its way to the student, who also [got] back her Record that she may understand the comments made by the teacher.” The writer also disclosed that the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music was employing an Edison Fireside Phonograph, along with hearing tubes and Edison blank cylinders.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *Popular Magazine*, reprinted in National Phonograph Company, “Heard Himself as Others Hear Him,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 3 (May 1905): 13, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. While *Popular Magazine* was acknowledged in the reprint version, it was not fully cited.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., “To Teach Vocal Music with the Phonograph,” [circular],

Because money was made from the sale of extra items required to make records, dealers were encouraged to promote the recording feature of the Edison Phonograph. In the May 1905 printing, for instance, the author announced, "Dealers should learn how to make Records, not only to sell the Phonograph itself, but because when used for Record making a sale also includes a recording horn, shaved blanks and other accessories." In this entry, entitled "A Good Talking Point," the writer suggested, "Every Dealer who desires to make a success of the Edison line should study up the matter of making Records in order to be able to demonstrate it to his customers, and he should never lose an opportunity of presenting it as a selling argument."<sup>160</sup>

Uniform statements of the same nature appeared in the September 1909 issue. In an article entitled "Home Recording," the author urged dealers to publicize that they were "... in a position to supply the equipment for making Records at home and [were] prepared to shave the blanks." The writer subsequently remarked that recording at home was a "... fascinating amusement and once started it grows on one," and, since the Edison Phonograph was "... the only type of Phonograph on which Records can be made at home," it was thought that this unique feature would lead to more sales.<sup>161</sup>

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*Edison Phonograph Monthly* 9 (June 1911): 2, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. According to The Thomas Edison Papers website, the National Phonograph Company published the monthly from March 1903-January 1911, after which it was distributed by Thomas A. Edison, Inc., [website] (accessed 02 July 2012); available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/glocpage.php3?gloc=CA06205&>; Internet.

<sup>160</sup> National Phonograph Company, "A Good Talking Point," [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 3 (May 1905): 5, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>161</sup> National Phonograph Company, "Home Recording," [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 7 (September 1909): 7, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas

In keeping with the imperative to promote the exclusive recording feature of the Edison Phonograph, the author of "Home Recording a Strong Feature" declared that this hallmark characteristic placed the Edison machine "in a class by itself." Writing in the August 1913 publication, the author implored dealers to "... procure at once a complete Edison Home Recording Outfit and familiarize himself with the making and shaving of records."<sup>162</sup>

The company declared the process of making records very easy, and, provided that the directions were adhered to faithfully, using the machine to shave cylinders was said not to present problems. Dealers were warned that if they had the "slightest difficulty" making records in front of potential buyers, customers would regard the process as too arduous and would not buy the product. To prevent this from happening, dealers were prompted to practice and to obtain two free brochures published by Edison on recording at home to assist in the record-making process: (1) "To Hear Ourselves as Others Hear Us; or, Confidences Concerning the Modern Blarney Stone" (Form 2290); and (2) "One of the Many Pleasures of the Edison Phonograph" (Form 2216).<sup>163</sup>

After equipping themselves with the knowledge about making records, dealers were exhorted to tend to the business of organizing a concert where they were to highlight the ability to record at home. A singer, an elocutionist, and a comic were among the suggested talent to be secured locally. The performance was intended to attract local school teachers, clergymen, Sunday school teachers,

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Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>162</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "Home Recording a Strong Feature," 10.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.



and families. Particular interest was paid to the musical education of boys and girls within families:

Does the boy play the banjo, the guitar or the mandolin? Let him make a record and find in it not only a source of amusement to others when he is not at home, but a means of learning better how to play these instruments. Does the girl take piano lessons? Her instructor will gladly assist her in making a record, or better yet, play the piano as it should be played, and then let the record thus made by the Phonograph be her guide to further practice.<sup>164</sup>

In tandem with promoting the home recording feature of the Edison phonograph for instructional purposes, the Edison School Phonograph was specifically designed for and advertised to the school market, as announced in the December 1912 issue in a piece entitled “Edison School Phonograph.” According to this article, the machine was positioned on a specially-designed mobile rolling cart for easy transport from classroom to classroom that included multiple drawers for holding pre-recorded music and blank cylinders. The “exclusive” recording feature of Edison’s device was once more touted as making it superior to all its competitors. As a result, “Inter-class singing contests and other interesting exercises [could] be worked out in connection with the recording feature.”<sup>165</sup>

The development of a phonograph specifically designed for the school market seemed logical, especially since Edison phonographs were being utilized in the schools well before the introduction of the model coined the Edison School Phonograph. The St. Louis Exposition, for example, featured recordings of the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., “Edison School Phonograph,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 10 (December 1912): 4-6, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

singing abilities of public school children in 1904. In a report entitled “Phonograph Records as Part of a School Exhibit,” the author described a bidding competition to earn the business of school officials in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to make records of students’ work. Despite incentives from a talking machine company, the contract was awarded to McGreal Bros., an Edison dealer: “This contract [was] a distinct endorsement of the Edison product, for the school authorities went over the matter with unusual care, finally selecting the McGreal Bros.’ proposition at a higher figure than offered by the competing company.”<sup>166</sup>

Edison phonographs were even endorsed by music teachers themselves. In an article in the July 1914 issue entitled “An Orchestra Leader and Violin Teacher Praises the Disc,” Leo B. Schoob, a violin teacher in Fall River, Massachusetts, and conductor of the Savoy Theatre Orchestra, was quoted as saying the following: “As a teacher of real, true music in the home, to children or others, there is no single instrument, and there is no individual music teacher who can bring so much of all that is best, to the ear that is hungry to learn.” He also thought that Edison’s new disc phonograph could “... even teach the teachers of music if they [were] willing to listen and to learn.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> National Phonograph Company, “Phonograph Records as Part of a School Exhibit,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 2 (February 1904): 4, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. The competing talking machine company was not identified by name.

<sup>167</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., “An Orchestra Leader and Violin Teacher Praises the Disc,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 12 (July 1914): 110, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

### The Recording Feature of the Edison Phonograph

One of the main differences between Edison's phonographs and the phonographs of his major competitor was the type of media used on their respective products. While Victor's talking machines exclusively employed flat discs, a number of Edison's phonographs utilized cylinders, thereby providing people the ability to record themselves on blank cylinders. Figure 2 shows a photograph of Edison looking at the recorder that inscribed sound indentations onto blank cylinders.<sup>168</sup> A similar but separate part was employed to play back recordings.

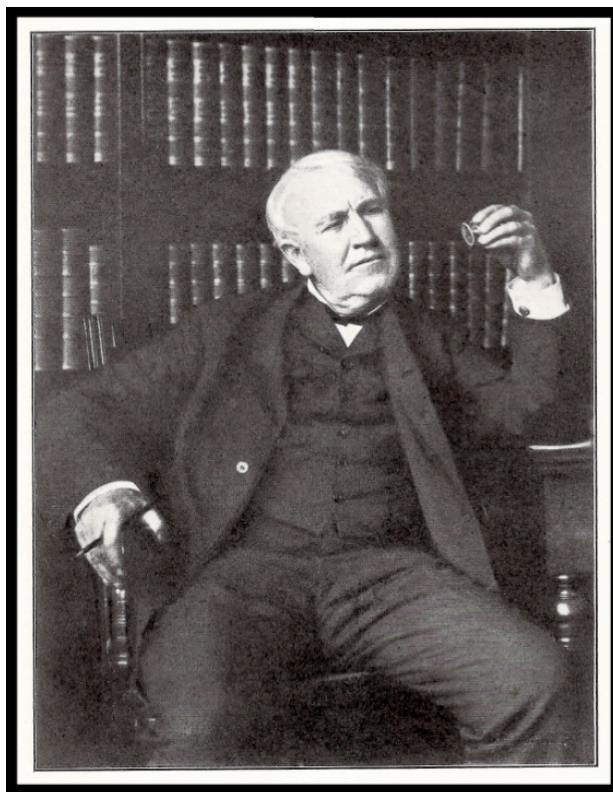


Figure 2. Edison looking at a recorder, courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

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<sup>168</sup> Dyer and Martin, *Edison*, [n.p.]. The caption of this photograph reads, "Edison in his Library, looking at the recorder of a phonograph."

Recording allowed users to evaluate and critique their own performances. In a booklet entitled “Edison and His Phonograph,” J. Lewis Young noted that “Actors and singers may likewise rehearse their parts with all the advantage of hearing themselves as others hear them, and thereby correcting or improving the style, tone, pronunciation, and articulation, which would otherwise be impossible.”<sup>169</sup>

Music educators employed this new method of self-learning as well. F. W. Wodell, for instance, indicated that he was “... now specializing in the use of the sound-reproducing machine in his studio as a means of giving pupils an opportunity to ‘hear themselves as others hear them,’ to a considerable extent.”<sup>170</sup> The strategy Wodell incorporated into his response was extracted from a previously mentioned Edison brochure about home recording entitled, “To Hear Ourselves as Others Hear Us.”<sup>171</sup>

The ability to record musical material and hear it played back was beneficial for songwriters as well. A 1911 article entitled “The Phonograph in Song Writing” appeared in the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, describing a new method Joe Howard utilized for retaining the “... musical inspirations that

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<sup>169</sup> J. Lewis Young, “Edison and His Phonograph,” [booklet], *The Talking Machine Review*, 19, Glendale Road, Bournemouth BH6 4JA, [n.d.], p. 38, The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, NAFME Historical Center, University of Maryland, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. Young also noted a non-recording related benefit for learning music that the phonograph facilitated: “It can also be used for teaching band parts, for we can place the hearing tubes in our ears and, while listening to the band, join in with the instrument which we are wont to play” (p. 39).

<sup>170</sup> “The Effect of Mechanical Instruments Upon Musical Education: A Symposium from Noted American Educators Upon a Question of Wide Significance,” *The Etude* 34 (July 1916): 484. The participants of the symposium were: Rossiter W. Cole, J. Warren Andrews, John J. Hattstaedt, Leroy B. Campbell, J. Lawrence Erb, John Orth, Frederick W. Root, Hans Schneider, Everett E. Truette, and F. W. Wodell.

<sup>171</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., “Home Recording a Strong Feature,” 10.

[came] to him unbidden at odd moments by means of an Edison Phonograph.”

Howard related how melodies sometimes vanish from memory, but that had become a thing of the past for him:

I carry a Phonograph with me always, and some blank Records, and sometimes I jump out of bed in the middle of the night when a new melody comes into my head and hum it into the Phonograph. Thus it is preserved, and I can go to sleep again and get my new melody when I want it.

Howard believed he secured a large amount of his best work via this method, and his obsession for capturing musical ideas was evidenced when a melody entered his mind as he walked. “When it does,” he said, “I make a bee-line for a Phonograph store, get it ‘canned’ at once and buy the Record.” He extolled the benefit of having recordings made for the non-musician as well. Howard reasoned that even a layman could thrive as a songwriter, “... as he [could] take the Record to a musician and have it written out for him.”<sup>172</sup>

Consistent with earlier company accounts, the National Phonograph Company continued to claim that making a record was a relatively simple process. Material in a brochure entitled “A Lasting Impression” maintained that creating records accounted for fifty percent of the enjoyment derived from possessing a phonograph. In this booklet from 1900, an updated recorder was said to reflect the ways in which Edison recordings were fashioned in the laboratory: “It adjusts itself automatically, making an even and deep cut in the

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<sup>172</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., “The Phonograph in Song Writing,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 9 (July 1911): 8, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. (Emphasis in original)

surface of a Blank.” Novices as well as more experienced recordists were assured satisfaction with this new attachment.<sup>173</sup>

The May 1911 issue of *The New Phonogram* included a section dedicated to inquiries related to the use of Edison phonographs and to making records. “What kind of a room is best for making Records in?” was the first question asked by J. G. of Tulsa, Oklahoma. For optimal results, recordings were to be made in “... a room which is filled to a moderate extent with furniture, curtains, etc. Records made in an unfurnished room will sound just as if made in such a room, especially in the vocal selections.” The reader’s second question concerned the type of horn to utilize. It was recommended that “For vocal selections our regular recording horn, 6x26 inches, is best, but satisfactory Records can also be made with the regular types.”<sup>174</sup>

### Recording Techniques

Several pamphlets published by Edison’s companies included instructions on using the phonograph to make records at home. One of the earliest, dated March 1, 1903, was published by the National Phonograph Company and was entitled “The Art of Making Phonograph Records.” Two subtitles appeared on

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<sup>173</sup> National Phonograph Company, “A Lasting Impression,” [booklet], [ca. 1903], p. 30, Primary Printed, Box 25, Folder 1 of 3, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. (Emphasis in original)

<sup>174</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., *The New Phonogram*, “Questions and Answers,” [n.v.] (May 1911): 19, The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonograph, Record Bulletins–Catalogs, Box 1 of 3, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. A booklet entitled “How to Make Records at Home” was mentioned in the “Questions and Answers” section. It was going to be sent to a reader, the purpose of which was to “... instruct you fully on all matters pertaining to home recording.” This brochure is discussed below, in the current section of this document.

the cover as well: “How to Make Records at Home” and “Methods Employed by our Experts.”<sup>175</sup>

The author of this brochure opened by explaining to the newcomer that the process of making excellent recordings was not simple to convey. The writer then encouraged the amateur to experiment, acknowledging that even professionals had a great deal to learn about the art of recording. Nevertheless, the pamphlet contained advice based on experience for selecting a recorder, adjusting the phonograph, using blank cylinders, and choosing appropriate horns for recording.<sup>176</sup>

Similar to the type of material a modern recording engineer would consult when selecting and using a microphone, recommendations for specific types of horns to employ, along with the appropriate distances from the horns to be maintained, were given based upon the type of material to be recorded. When making a vocal recording, for instance, the Edison experts prescribed the following: “The horn selected is usually six inches in diameter at the large opening, twenty-six inches long, tapering down to five-eighths of an inch.” Placement of the horn, which was attached with a rubber tube to the phonograph, was also crucial in relation to the singer’s mouth: “It has always been found that a horn pointed upward gives much better results for vocal music than if pointed perfectly horizontal, and the singer placed from five to eight

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<sup>175</sup> National Phonograph Company, “The Art of Making Phonograph Records,” [booklet], (Orange, NJ: March 1903), Form 427, Primary Printed Collection, Box 25, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

inches from the mouth of the horn."<sup>177</sup>

While this circular contained no diagrams or pictures, subsequent manuals on home recording did contain images to assist readers. Figure 3, for instance, was included in "How to Make Records at Home with an Edison Phonograph." The illustration may have proved helpful when directions had to be interpreted: "The piccolos have a position between two and three feet from the horn, and the clarinets are raised two or three feet from the floor and lined up in two rows, one on each side of the horn, blowing across."<sup>178</sup>

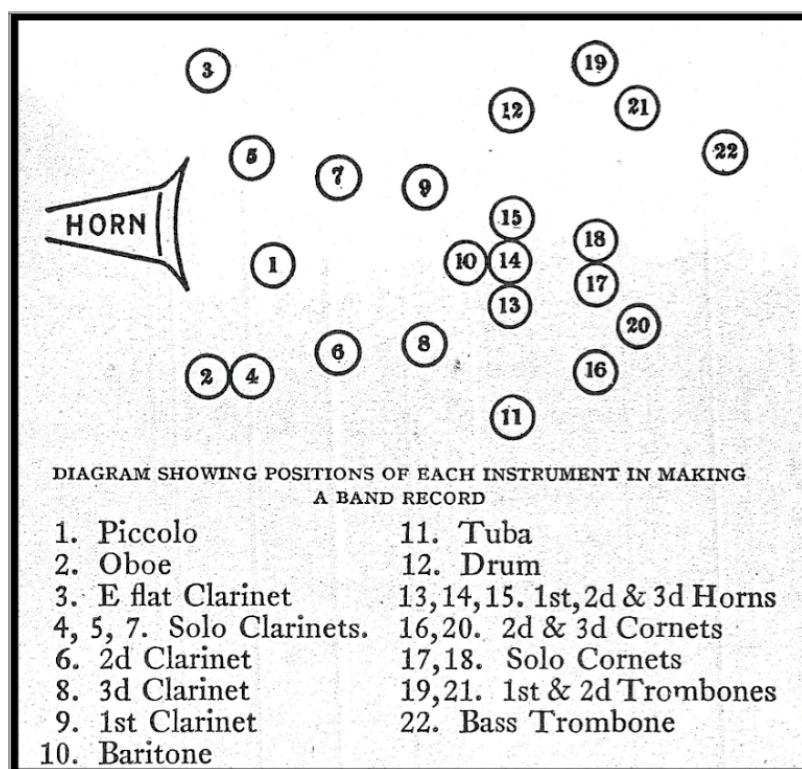


Figure 3. Setup for making a band record, courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>178</sup> National Phonograph Company, "How to Make Records at Home with an Edison Phonograph," [booklet], [Orange, NJ], [1910], Form 1090, p. 13, Primary Printed Collection, Box 24, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.



Instructions for making a solo record with piano included the diagram shown in figure 4. According to the author, the piano should be away from the wall with the horn of the phonograph aimed toward its back. The vocalist was to sing straight into the horn while standing near the right side of the piano (from the player's perspective).<sup>179</sup>

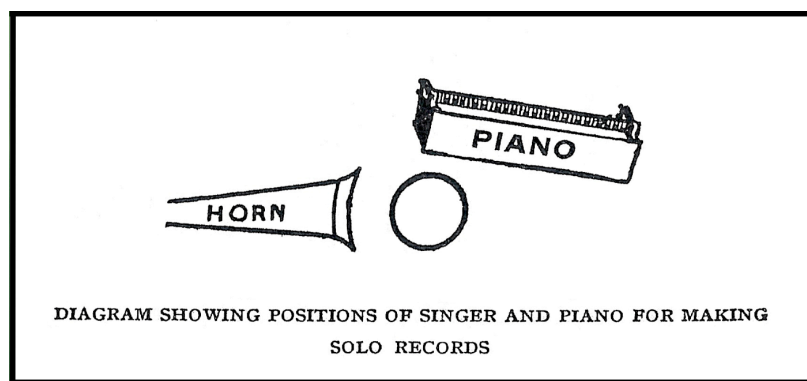


Figure 4. Placement diagram for a voice and piano record, courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

A different setup for the same performers appeared in “Making Records at Home: One of the Many Pleasures of the Edison Phonograph.” While the horn of the phonograph was still pointed toward the treble strings, in figure 5 the horn was behind the pianist, and the author dictated a beginning distance of five feet between the piano’s sounding board and the phonograph. Depending upon the volume of the vocalist in relation to the piano, the distance was to be increased even further. Another key difference concerned the portion of the piano that was removed to reveal the soundboard, something that may not be inferred from figure 4.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>180</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., “Making Records at Home: One of the Many Pleasures of the



Figure 5. Picture demonstrating how to make a voice and piano recording, courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

Although making one's own records was advertised as uncomplicated, the results were generally not comparable to those achieved in a recording studio. This reality was acknowledged in some literature, with the expectation that the public would still find value in recording meaningful moments:

The enjoyment the Phonograph affords is largely increased, and the interest materially heightened, by the fact that you can make your own records at home, and they, while perhaps not as loud as those you purchase, possess a value to you which no others have, because upon an inanimate cylinder you have for all time a record in speech, vocal or

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Edison Phonograph," [booklet], [Orange, NJ], (May 1912), Form 2216, p. 10, Primary Printed-Edison Comp., EDIS-54100, Box 42, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. This booklet is also archived on Nipperhead, [website]; available from <http://www.nipperhead.com/old/recording01.htm>, accessed on 30 June 2012; Internet.

instrumental music, of your family or those who have been welcome guests in your home.<sup>181</sup>

To aid the layperson, tips were given for recording speech, vocal and instrumental selections, piano, and a band. A distance of four inches from the Recording Trumpet<sup>182</sup> was recommended for speech. Enunciating clearly was encouraged, along with introducing each take for test recordings so that when the recordings were played back, the result of each trial could be noted. For vocal recording, there were no clearly defined rules, but these tips were given: (1) sing at a distance of approximately six inches from a 26-inch trumpet; (2) “sing as evenly as possible;” and (3) sing at a dynamic level so as not to “jar” the recorder, which would result in an “unpleasant tone.” Jarring the recorder would also occur when the piano’s damper pedal was depressed for select passages. If piano accompaniment for a song was desired, the optimal results for home recording were “... obtained by the use of a Y branch or special recording union....” The key to securing successful instrumental recordings was to take into consideration the strength of the vibrations produced: “a zither or banjo may be as close as possible; a cornet must be several feet away.” Drums were generally banned at this point in the evolution of recording technology, not only because of their loud output, but when recording a band, “... their sound waves almost invariably destroy the other vibrations.” An acceptable recording of a band was deemed

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<sup>181</sup> “Edison Bell Phonographs: British Home of the Phonograph,” [booklet], [1905], [n.p.], The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonographs, Box 1 of 3, Folder: Edison-Endless, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>182</sup> A recording trumpet was described as follows: “Recording Trumpets have no bell and are straight from the mouth to the point, thus allowing the sound waves to reach the diaphragm without being broken up, as would be the case were the ordinary Trumpet used.” “Edison Bell Phonographs,” [n.p.].

“extremely difficult” because of the number of test recordings that needed to be made to capture the most effective balance and blend between the various instruments. Experimentation, such as would be required to properly record the aforementioned ensemble, was encouraged. “... [E]xperience,” it was suggested, “[was] the best teacher.”<sup>183</sup>

### **Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music**

In 1906, *Masterpieces of Melody and The Musical Art* and *A History of Music* were published together in one volume by the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music. It was compiled solely for students of the school and was edited by a Dr. Nathaniel I. Rubinkam of the University of Chicago. The book consisted of various items such as music lessons for banjo, violin, piano, and voice, among other instruments, and material related to a gallery of composers and performers in the form of accompanying biographies and sheet music. Samuel Siegel, for example, composed “American Valor,” for which piano sheet music was included, and he also authored “Mandolin Lesson No. 4,” which was accompanied by illustrations showing how to hold a plectrum properly. Names of the officers and faculty of this correspondence school are displayed in table

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<sup>183</sup> “Edison Bell Phonographs,” [n.p.].

<sup>184</sup> Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, *Masterpieces of Melody and The Musical Art* as well as *A History of Music* (Chicago: Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, 1906), *passim*, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

Table 2

## Officers and Faculty of the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music (1906)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title and/or Teaching Discipline</i>
J. W. Myers	President & Treasurer
Samuel Siegel	Vice President / Mandolin
H. T. Myers	Secretary
Adolph Rosenbecker	Dean of the Faculty / Harmony
George Crampton	Voice Culture
William H. Sherwood	Piano
Arthur Heft	Violin
Frank W. Van Dusen	Organ
Frederick J. Bacon	Banjo
Wm. Foden	Guitar

The Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music published the *Normal Course of Lessons in Piano and Harmony given by the University Extension Method* in 1910. There were some changes to the list of officers and faculty, including the addition of new faculty members. Samuel Siegel was now the president of the school, H. T. Myers was the vice president, and A. J. Llewellyn was the treasurer and general manager. In the “Addenda,” Mr. Clarence Eddy, Mr. Glenn Dillard Gunn, and Mrs. Frances E. Clark<sup>185</sup> were listed as new faculty members. Lastly, Choral Conducting, taught by Dr. Daniel Portheroe, was added to the school’s curricular offerings.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> See chapter 3 of this dissertation for a discussion of some of Frances Elliott Clark’s work with the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music.

<sup>186</sup> Siegel-Myers, *Normal Course of Lessons in Piano and Harmony*, *passim*.

In this book, the advantages of studying by correspondence, celebrated as a defining accomplishment of the era, were discussed. Talented students with initiative had opportunities to study at minimal expense under the tutelage of seasoned virtuosos, all while remaining in the comfort of their own homes. Lessons could be taken at the student's convenience and repeated as often as necessary. "Your teacher is with you constantly," the school trumpeted, "and may be consulted at any time."<sup>187</sup>

Those who were said to be taking advantage of people by offering substandard correspondence courses with profit as the number one goal were chided for their alleged unscrupulous operations. "... [U]nprincipled men saw in this method a chance to exploit the public and 'get rich-quick' by offering an easy road to knowledge, with the aid of inferior 'lessons,' not really caring whether the student learned or not," it was explained. The school argued, "Such material bears the same relation to real correspondence lessons that the cheap novel bears to literature."<sup>188</sup>

By contrast, superior distance education, such as could be obtained through the use of materials from the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, was a proven practice because universities offered portions of their programs via this method:

Nearly all of the leading universities have introduced correspondence courses into their curricula. Two-thirds of the work required for a degree

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

from the best colleges can be taken by correspondence; even biology, and the technical subjects are successfully taught by this method.<sup>189</sup>

The school therefore sought to be the first to effectively apply the correspondence model to the teaching of music.<sup>190</sup>

This objective seemed to be met within the first decade of the school's existence (1900-1910). The institution reported having approximately thirty thousand students in American states, as well as students in "... Canada, Honolulu, Alaska, Mexico, the West India islands, Central and South America, England, France, Germany, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and Turkey." Endorsements by music educators were given to the school for conceiving of and implementing the best method of correspondence study. Even local teachers in the Chicago area were taking lessons, "... proof enough in itself that the correspondence system [was] eminently successful."<sup>191</sup>

One faculty member teaching for the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music was of particular significance for this work. The author of the singing lesson in the 1906 volume mentioned previously was billed in this book as a "... noted English basso, concert singer and teacher of the art of correct singing." The next portion of George Crampton's description may have astounded some readers: "Singing given with the aid of the Phonograph."<sup>192</sup>

Crampton did indeed incorporate the phonograph into his singing lessons for the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music. In the October 1911 issue of *The New Phonogram*, it was reported that the type of phonograph being

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 2.

employed for this purpose was an Edison phonograph: "Correspondence courses that they are selling provide for the teaching of vocal music by mail with the assistance of Edison Phonographs, and moulded and blank Records."<sup>193</sup>

Crampton sang on all the records for the courses, and he critiqued the work of each student after listening to the recordings they made at home and returned by mail. "[H]ighly instructive" was the verdict given by the writer of the entry, and the logistical aspects of the system were described as having been "thoroughly demonstrated." A recommendation for the course was then given for "... any one [*sic*] with a desire to combine a source of education and culture with the entertaining possibilities of the Phonograph."<sup>194</sup>

Allen Koenigsberg included in his book photographs of a sample of wrappers from the containers for Edison's cylinder records, one of them for the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music. The wrapper for the blank disc showed a patent date of June 4, 1907; it contained the following warning: "This patented blank is licensed by Thomas A. Edison, Incorporated for sale and use only in connection with the correspondence vocal lessons given by the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, Chicago, Ill."<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "New Use For Phonograph," *The New Phonogram* [booklet], [n.v.] (October 1911): 15, The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonograph, Record Bulletins-Catalogs, Box 1 of 3, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. (Emphasis in original)

<sup>195</sup> Allen Koenigsberg, *Edison Cylinder Records, 1889-1912, with an Illustrated History of the Phonograph* (New York City: Stellar Productions, 1969), 157.



### Edison Phonographs in Schools

Before a particular Edison phonograph model was designated for school use in 1912, other Edison phonographs were utilized for classroom work at least as early as 1893. The North American Phonograph Company, for example, publicized “The Educational Phonograph” for “public school work.” It was similar to other phonographs, with “... additional devices for having several voices recorded alternately and in quick succession upon the cylinder.” “Music,” it was reported, “one of the most interesting features now of public school work, may have recorded upon it fifty, seventy-five, or one hundred voices, so that the work and music may be distinct in every respect.” The benefits of listening to recordings were advocated because “... the Phonograph will not only give to a few, but will be able to indicate to the great mass of school children, both the way in which the music should be written, and exactly how it should be sung....” Toward the end of the brochure there was a section entitled “Educational Uses of the Phonograph,” with the following statement: “With the use of the Phonograph, the songs and recitations of the public school children are being listened to by persons from all parts of the world.”<sup>196</sup>

An article entitled “The Phonograph—How it May Help Music Teachers” by Nimmo Christie appeared in the *Edison Phonograph Monthly* in March 1905. Christie began the article by bringing to mind how much the phonograph had been improved. In the past, he remembered, listening to the phonograph was

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<sup>196</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, “Education Instruction,” [brochure], [1893], [database online]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=CA027>, accessed on (02 July 2012), TAED, CA027J [Document ID], CA027 [Folder ID], Images 1-11 of 11, Rutgers; Internet.

painful; however, with the latest refinements, it nearly approached the point of “artistic pleasure.” Christie believed people in general were aware of the advancements, but his purpose was to inform them of some uses that were not well known, particularly some practical ways that musicians, especially vocal teachers, could employ the phonograph. He noted how listening to the voices of reputable singers was important, especially for those in rural areas, although the phonograph at this point still did not reproduce the voice perfectly. Christie mentioned the work of Professor McKendrick, who argued, “... the material composing the Phonographic recorder and ‘reproducer’ had tendencies of its own which no doubt modified the pure effects of the vocal sounds.” Christie did concede, however, that there was “... quite enough of a singer’s voice registered to serve purposes both of pleasure and art.”<sup>197</sup>

In addition to the recording quality being acceptable for listening to respected musicians, the benefits achieved by recording one’s self was put forth by Christie as a possible tool for the educator, not only for themselves but also for instructing others:

Let the teacher sing into his Phonograph, and then listen to the result—preferably at a future time. He may feel surprise. Dispassionately he will be able to regard himself from the outside—as others see him, or hear him, rather. All his own perfections and imperfections he will be in a position to set in a note-book, con, and learn by rote. And all the while his conscience will not permit him to deny the identity of what he hears with the tones and accents of his own voice. This is no slight service. So distinguished a man as Saint Saens [*sic*] admits that by means of the Phonograph he made the discovery that he was in the habit of playing

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<sup>197</sup> Nimmo Christie, National Phonograph Company, “The Phonograph—How it May Help Music Teachers,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 3 (March 1905): 11, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. This article was referenced to have appeared in the *Musical Herald*, London, but no further identifying details were given in the monthly.

incorrectly a passage in his *Valse Canariote*. In consequence he advises musicians to make use of it.<sup>198</sup>

It was clear to Christie that if the teacher could obtain these kinds of outcomes, then it was undoubtedly a method that should be applied when working with students. He mentioned, as an example, that pupils had trouble with “pure vowels.” “A student listening to his own voice as if it were the voice of some one [*sic*] else,” Christie reasoned, “can hardly fail to perceive its defects when the teacher draws attention to them.” His final point extolled the power of the phonograph to help create a log of growth and progress: “... [T]he gradual progress of a pupil from his first feeble efforts to his final state of perfection may be recorded with precision, for the pupil’s own gratification and for the encouragement of his successors in their moments of despondency.”<sup>199</sup>

The advantages of using the phonograph in an instrumental setting were examined in a 1906 issue of the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*. In “The Phonograph as a Band Teacher,” which was reprinted from the *Musical Advertiser*, rehearsals were reported to be “delights rather than tortures” because of the phonograph:

It helps the musician who is not as clever as the others by giving him the correct time and expression at once. What would take half a dozen rehearsals to properly learn, can be accomplished in a few with the aid of the Phonograph.<sup>200</sup>

The author of the article also predicted that the use of the phonograph’s recording feature for rehearsal purposes would be commonplace in the near

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> *Musical Advertiser*, reprinted in National Phonograph Company, “The Phonograph as a Band Teacher,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 4 (September 1906): 12, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. This entry referenced the *Musical Advertiser* as its source, but it was not fully cited in the monthly.

future: "It will not be long before bands and orchestras throughout the entire country will be using the Phonograph as a sort of critic at rehearsals. Its use in this connection should be encouraged. Its value can easily be recognized."<sup>201</sup>

Even though phonographs with exposed horns were losing popularity to cabinet-style models with concealed horns and were eventually discontinued, the Edison School Phonograph was reported as being excluded from termination in a 1913-1914 catalog for Edison cylinder phonographs. It was reported in the catalog that this phonograph's ever-increasing popularity as a standard resource in the modern classroom was the reasoning behind the manufacture of the Edison School Phonograph. The machine was described as reproducing pre-recorded pieces "... with a brilliancy and clearness which [held] the attention of the pupils, and which [made] the phonograph practical for assembly-room or playground use." The option of recording student work was publicized as exclusive, and the instructional advantages from such recordings were assumed to be of value to sensible teachers.<sup>202</sup>

### **Company Advertisements**

The Edison phonograph was heavily marketed through print advertisements that appeared in various publications, including both popular and music magazines. Numerous brochures, pamphlets, and booklets also promoted Edison's phonograph products to men, women, children, and families.

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "Edison Phonographs. Cylinder Types. 1913-1914," [catalog], [Orange, NJ, 01 September 1913], pp. 16-17, Form No. 2454, [website] (accessed 02 July 2012); available from <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/catalog/catalog1.html>; Internet.

Edison companies consistently advocated the educational benefits of listening to pre-recorded music and making one's own recordings in their advertisements, in addition to championing the superiority of Edison's phonograph over his competitor's talking machines. "Those who have heard only the so-called talking machines have no idea of the purity of musical tone, the clearness and loudness of speech, in the PHONOGRAPH," was the opening message of an advertisement that appeared in *Current Literature*. The National Phonograph Company furthermore proclaimed Edison's phonograph to be "... a sweet musical instrument that educates the children and gives pleasure to guest and host alike."<sup>203</sup>

Because of its instructional merit, the Edison phonograph was advanced as "better than toys" in another National Phonograph Company advertisement (see figure 6). "The Phonograph is the best present," it was argued, "because of its inexhaustible variety and its educational value."<sup>204</sup> Indeed, two areas emphasized in advertisements for the phonograph centered on amusement and instruction. "Modern times have not produced its equal for amusement and

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<sup>203</sup> National Phonograph Company, "Most Acceptable. The Edison Phonograph for Christmas or Birthdays," [advertisement], printed in *Current Literature* 34 (New York: The Current Literature Publishing Company, January 1903): [n.p.], Primary Printed, Box 24, Natl. Phono Co. Advertisements, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. (Emphasis in original)

<sup>204</sup> National Phonograph Company, "Better Than Toys. The Edison Phonograph," [advertisement], [n.p.], Primary Printed, Box 24, Natl. Phono Co. Advertisements, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. There was no identifying information of the magazine(s) where this advertisement was printed.

instruction,” for instance, was a theme the National Phonograph Company publicized.<sup>205</sup>



Figure 6. “Better Than Toys” advertisement, courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

<sup>205</sup> National Phonograph Company, “Intense Interest in the Edison Phonograph is Justified by its Perfection,” [advertisement], printed in *Public Opinion* 31 (November 1901): 604, Primary Printed, Box 24, Natl. Phono Co. Advertisements, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. See figure 7 for another example of the amusement and instruction theme.

The recording feature of the Edison Phonograph furnished educational opportunities and provided entertainment possibilities as well. As shown in figure 7, it was marketed as "... the machine with which successful records can be made at home, affording unending amusement and instruction."<sup>206</sup> In an advertisement in the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, recording purportedly increased the satisfaction of a phonograph owner two-fold.<sup>207</sup>

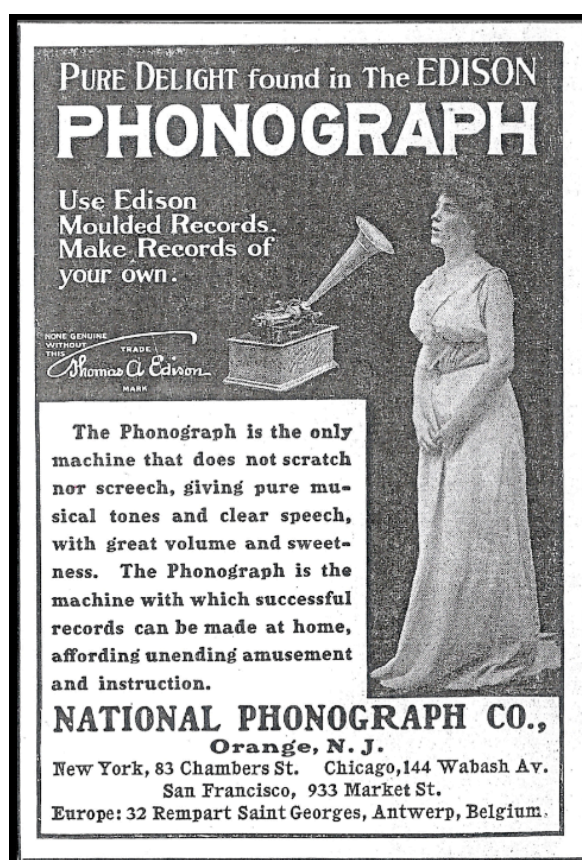


Figure 7. "Pure Delight found in The Edison Phonograph" advertisement, courtesy of Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

<sup>206</sup> National Phonograph Company, "Pure Delight Found in The Edison Phonograph," [advertisement], printed in *Current Literature* 34 (New York: The Current Literature Publishing Company, February 1903): [n.p.], Primary Printed, Box 24, Natl. Phono Co. Advertisements, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>207</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "Making Records at Home," [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 10 (August 1912): 15, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

### Ethnomusicology

The ability to capture and reproduce sound on a phonograph enabled field recording, an important tool that greatly enhanced the capacity of ethnomusicologists to more accurately document the music of various cultures. In his thesis entitled “Phantom Power: Recording Studio History, Practice, and Mythology,” James Alan Williams noted:

In contrast to commercial field trips, much of the history of ethnomusicology is rooted in an assumption that recordings, properly undertaken in the natural environment, can represent a measure of “truth.” Looking for a way to validate the subjective nature of folkloric study, a small number of folklorists and anthropologists embraced the very thing about the wax cylinder record that most consumers had rejected—the ability to *make* recordings.<sup>208</sup>

Armed with a tool for accurately preserving the musics of many peoples, researchers entered into the field in many different parts of the world.

On such scholar was J. Walter Fewkes, who traveled to Calais, Maine to make recordings of “... the language, folk-lore, songs, and counting-out rhymes of the Passamaquoddy Indians.” Fewkes engineered recordings of a “Mohawk war song,” a “trade song,” and the “song of the snake dance.” “Old folk-tales” were acquired, some of which contained “... ancient songs with archaic words, imitation of the voices of animals, old and young.”<sup>209</sup>

Fewkes also recorded Zuni Indians in New Mexico on the Edison

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<sup>208</sup> James Alan Williams, “Phantom Power: Recording Studio History, Practice, and Mythology” (Ph.D. thesis, Brown University, 2006), 62. (Emphasis in original)

<sup>209</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, “Edison Phonograph. Its Use in the Preservation of the Languages of the American Indians,” [newspaper], 19 July 1890, [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=SC90033A&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (11 July 2012), TAED, SC90033A [Document ID], SC90 [Folder ID], Image 37 of 98, Rutgers; Internet. While the exact newspaper in which this article appeared is not legible, the editors labeled the clipping as being from a newspaper in Hartford, Connecticut.



phonograph, capturing "... songs connected with the celebration of the mid-summer dances, which occur at or near the summer solstice." He noted that "One ... [Zuni] asked if a person was hidden in the machine, and another thought the phonograph bewitched." Overall, he commented, they were very open to having recordings made of their music, except when it came to sacred songs:

The great difficulty in getting them to repeat their sacred songs and prayers does not come so much from their fear of the instrument as of secularizing what is sacred to them. They will readily respond with any of their secular songs, or with those sung in public, but those belonging to the secret ceremonials of the Estufa they will not divulge.<sup>210</sup>

The *Edison Phonograph Monthly* included some research by one Dr. A. L. Kroeber, who was studying two Mojave Indians at the University of California. Like other Native American tribes, the Mojave had no written language, so Kroeber recorded them with an Edison phonograph. Among other things, he recorded a song for a Mojave ritual that included religious elements and lasted all night, a process that produced approximately 60 cylinders.<sup>211</sup>

### Thomas A. Edison, Inc. Questionnaires

In 1921, a questionnaire was sent to Edison owners with the intention of discovering customers' favorite musical pieces. It was designed to elicit twenty

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<sup>210</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, "On the Use of the Phonograph Among the Zuni Indians," [article], 05 July 1890, [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=SC90033A&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (11 July 2012), TAED, SC90033A [Document ID], SC90 [Folder ID], Images 50-52 of 98, Rutgers; Internet. This article is found in *The American Naturalist* 24 (July 1890): 687-91.

<sup>211</sup> National Phonograph Company, "Phonograph Holds the Secret of Mojaves," [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 1 (December 1903): 4, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. This article originally appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner* on November 12, 1903.

written selections and the reasons for why an owner chose each piece. Customers were also asked if they had already acquired recordings of their favorite tunes, whether the catalog numbers of the tunes were known, and whether or not Edison sold their favorite recordings.

Thomas A. Edison, Inc. developed two similar questionnaires to gather the aforementioned information, the main difference being the way in which the introductory material was written. One version, for instance, was composed on a more personal level, as if Thomas Edison himself was requesting information about an owner's favorite tunes, while the other was written from the perspective of the company asking for the details of owners' record collections on behalf of Mr. Edison. In the latter, owners were encouraged not to "... hesitate to name some simple little ballad, or dance tune, among [your] favorites, if that is the way [you feel]."<sup>212</sup>

Both formats were straightforward and easy to complete (estimated at approximately fifteen minutes). At least one respondent disagreed. Marie Rood wrote on her questionnaire: "You really underestimated the time required for above!"<sup>213</sup>

In addition to remarks of this nature, owners often provided personal stories, amusing details, and nuggets of wisdom. The following answer to the request to provide a reason for liking a certain tune, for example, was penned by

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<sup>212</sup> The two different formats of the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaire may be observed in the responses of Charles Hall, 04 March 1921, and Reverend Anderson Crain, 19 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>213</sup> Marie Rood, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 25 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

Ernest C. Wegman: "It's like asking my three year old daughter why she likes ice cream. She says she likes it but she doesn't know why."<sup>214</sup> Franklin Le Pelley concluded, "Any machine will give you a tune but there is only one that will give you a tone, The Edison."<sup>215</sup> "I never cared to own a phonograph until I heard an Edison," revealed Reverend Anderson Crain, "as the others to me are far from musical, but after hearing an Edison, I bought one straightway."<sup>216</sup>

A number of owners described the ways in which they utilized the phonograph to learn music. Theron Akers, for instance, an amateur saxophonist, noted that he was grateful for "... all the Edison Recreations with a saxophone player in it as it helps me in my study."<sup>217</sup> Another owner, Mary L. Spaulding, wanted a re-creation of a particular song because she was working on it for a voice lesson.<sup>218</sup>

Children played an especially crucial role in the success of the phonograph, and home deliveries like the one seen in figure 8 helped capture their attention. Youngsters, including Mrs. Carl Westerdoll's daughter, utilized the phonograph to learn music: "My small daughter 3 years old sings what she

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<sup>214</sup> Ernest C. Wegman, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 08 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>215</sup> Franklin Le Pelley, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 15 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>216</sup> Reverend Anderson Crain, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 19 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>217</sup> Theron Akers, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 10 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>218</sup> Mary L. Spaulding, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 11 January 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

hears. She plays the Edison herself. I should like records she could learn. Any kindergarten song would do.”<sup>219</sup> “I have a daughter,” H. A. P. similarly attested, who “sings [songs] with the Edison.”<sup>220</sup>



Figure 8. Edison worker giving a cylinder re-creation to a child, courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

<sup>219</sup> Mrs. Carl Westerdoll, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 04 February 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>220</sup> H. A. P., response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, undated but stamped as received on 03 February 1921 by the Advertising Service Dept., collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. This respondent's last name is illegible. However, initials were provided for the first and middle names as "H. A.", and the last name begins with the letter "P"; therefore, this person is referred to herein by the initials H. A. P.

Other Edison owners played instruments along with recordings on the phonograph. Mrs. Frank A. Eaton, for example, enjoyed accompanying “A Little More Pepper” on the piano.<sup>221</sup> “I can play my cornet with the record,” noted F. B. Travis of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.<sup>222</sup>

Multiple owners confirmed Edison’s prediction that his machine would function in the capacity of a music teacher. L. F. Hill, for instance, announced, “My Edison is teaching me to enjoy Classical music more and more—opening the door of a wonderful treasure house otherwise beyond my means.”<sup>223</sup> “I can’t tell you how much good you have done to make it possible for people to hear good music in their own homes,” wrote Mrs. A. B. Castator of Richmond, Indiana. She then went on to add, “It was a real musical education for my children to have the Edison.”<sup>224</sup> Mallgren declared, “... [The] Edison Phonograph has been a conservatory in my house for over five years. We read the descriptive matter on the cover; study all about the piece and thus we have been able to gather a big source of musical information.”<sup>225</sup> Stan Willard Luthing closed a letter he sent along with his response as follows: “With renewed expression of my pleasure

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<sup>221</sup> Mrs. Frank A. Eaton, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 23 January 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>222</sup> F. B. Travis, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 16 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>223</sup> L. F. Hill, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 17 February 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>224</sup> Mrs. A. B. Castator, letter included with response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, [1921], collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>225</sup> Mallgren, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 09 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. There appear to be initials at the beginning of Mallgren’s signature, but they are illegible.

and delight in your increasing success as an educator of the American public in a real appreciation of good music."<sup>226</sup>

### Conclusions

The contributions of Thomas Edison's phonograph businesses to music education were numerous but heretofore largely unreported. Although much has been written about the invention and early uses of the phonograph, very little scholarly attention has been directed toward its usage in formal music teaching and learning settings, the reasons for which were not due to a lack of information. Clear evidence was found in the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, where, for example, the recording feature of Edison's phonograph was advertised and promoted as an educational tool. The Edison School Phonograph, moreover, was announced therein as a tool to be employed in traditional instructional settings.

In formal distance education in music, the association with the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music further points to some of the Edison phonograph businesses' connections to and interest in music instruction. George Crampton's incorporation and endorsement of Edison's phonograph products into his lessons for the school show the value that was placed on the educational growth that could take place through recording both student and teacher. While this process did not become a mainstay in music education, the fact that Edison endorsed and advertised Crampton's method shows his belief in the use of the

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<sup>226</sup> Stan Willard Luthing, letter included with response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 23 April 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. More information stemming from the questionnaires will be examined in the next chapter.

phonograph in music education. The process that Crampton employed in conjunction with Thomas Edison's phonograph business was somewhat ahead of its time. Musical instruction via recordings, whether solely audio or both video and audio, is commonplace today.

While less formal from an educational standpoint but no less important, the recording manuals produced by Edison's phonograph companies were written to help people improve their recordings, the value of which should not be underestimated. Being able to record the music of various cultures via Edison's phonograph, for instance, was of incalculable benefit to the field of ethnomusicology.

The ability of both amateurs and professionals to "hear themselves as others hear them" was utilized for self-evaluation and self-improvement. In a sense, Edison's products enabled the individual to become his or her own teacher. Once again, Edison was somewhat ahead of his time. Although this type of listening did not become the standard for music education, its importance cannot be overlooked.

## CHAPTER III

THE VICTOR TALKING MACHINE COMPANY  
AND FRANCES ELLIOTT CLARK

*The talking machine came into existence to amuse—it remains to educate. What was once a luxury has become a necessity—a curious toy has come to be a practical and indispensable instrument in modern education.*

—Frances Elliott Clark<sup>227</sup>

The Victor Talking Machine Company is well known within the music education community as a result of its association with an important figure in music education, Frances Elliott Clark.<sup>228</sup> Although Victor and Clark have received the vast majority of the coverage related to the phonograph in the music education history literature, as noted in the prologue of the present document, Birge mentioned that additional phonograph companies produced similar material for school music. Despite this mention, neither he nor subsequent music education scholars have addressed the contributions of these companies, including the company that produced and marketed the first phonographs. One of these companies Birge alluded to was the Columbia Phonograph Company, which had an education department that, like Victor, published a music series.<sup>229</sup> The contributions of the Columbia Phonograph Company, however, are outside

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<sup>227</sup> Frances Elliott Clark, "The Talking Machine as a Necessary Part of the Equipment in the Modern School" (address, The Department of School Administration of the N.E.A., Chicago, July 11, 1912): 5, Frances Elliott Clark Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Series 1.1, Box 1, Folder 4, Item 1.0, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>228</sup> See Jere T. Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic Representation in Two Music Education History Books," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 131 (winter 1997): 70-71.

<sup>229</sup> Columbia Phonograph Company, *School Room Music* (New York: Educational Department, [1912]); The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonograph, Record Bulletins-Catalogs, Box 1 of 3, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.



the scope of this study. Given that Victor was Edison's main competitor in general and in the school market in particular, an overview of the Victor Talking Machine Company's output with Frances Elliott Clark at the helm of its Educational Department is given in this chapter.

### Frances Elliott Clark

As one of the preeminent figures in music education history,<sup>230</sup> Frances Elliott Clark's life and work have been thoroughly chronicled. The most comprehensive writing about her career is Eugene Stoddard's dissertation.<sup>231</sup> A condensed outline of her professional endeavors prior to working for the Victor Talking Machine Company is provided below.

Frances Elliott Clark pursued a teaching career after being widowed in 1880. After attending school and teaching in Indiana, she moved to Monmouth, Illinois to become a music supervisor in 1891. By 1896, Clark found herself teaching and supervising music in Ottumwa, Iowa.<sup>232</sup>

Clark's successes as a music teacher and supervisor led her to write material at the turn of the twentieth century that focused on the fundamentals of music theory, with a goal of preparing Iowa classroom teachers for examinations. The preface of her *A Hand Book of Music* provided insight into Clark's thinking at

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<sup>230</sup> One scholar calculated that Frances Elliott Clark received more coverage than any other woman in survey books on American music education history by Birge (*History of Public School Music in the United States*) and Mark and Gary (*A History of American Music Education*). See Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic Representation," 67-86.

<sup>231</sup> Stoddard, "Frances Elliott Clark."

<sup>232</sup> Stoddard, "Frances Elliott Clark," 52-64; and Keene, *A History of Music Education*, 260-61.

that stage of her career, prior to her shift toward listening-based music education:

The author of this little Primer believes that immediate information is needed covering the rudiments of the theory of music, to enable teachers who have not given special attention to music to inform themselves on those points likely to appear in examination lists, and also to serve as a hand book [*sic*] in the study of the elements of this most delightful art.<sup>233</sup>

In this guide for Iowa teachers (see fig. 9), Clark aimed to educate teachers who lacked sufficient knowledge of music fundamentals, all with an eye toward encouraging the Iowa state legislature to incorporate music in the state curriculum, a move Clark believed would “... be one of the most interesting and valuable features of the ‘New education’.”<sup>234</sup>

Clark continued in Ottumwa until accepting the music supervisor position in 1903 for the Milwaukee public school system in Wisconsin. It was during her time in Milwaukee, in 1907, that Clark attended an important gathering in Keokuk, Iowa to preside over the historic first meeting of what would become the Music Supervisors National Conference.<sup>235</sup>

Before she was appointed head of the education department at the Victor Talking Machine Company, Clark worked for the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music in Chicago,<sup>236</sup> the same school that promoted the recording feature of Edison’s phonograph in conjunction with the voice lessons of George

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<sup>233</sup> Frances Elliott Clark, *A Hand Book of Music* (Des Moines, IA: Midland Schools, 1900), [n.p.]; Frances Elliott Clark Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Series 2.1, Box 4, Folder 2, Item 1.0, NAfME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, [n.p.].

<sup>235</sup> Stoddard, “Frances Elliott Clark,” 64-73.

<sup>236</sup> Clark may have come to the attention of the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music as a result of her work for the American Book Company School (ABCS), a textbook

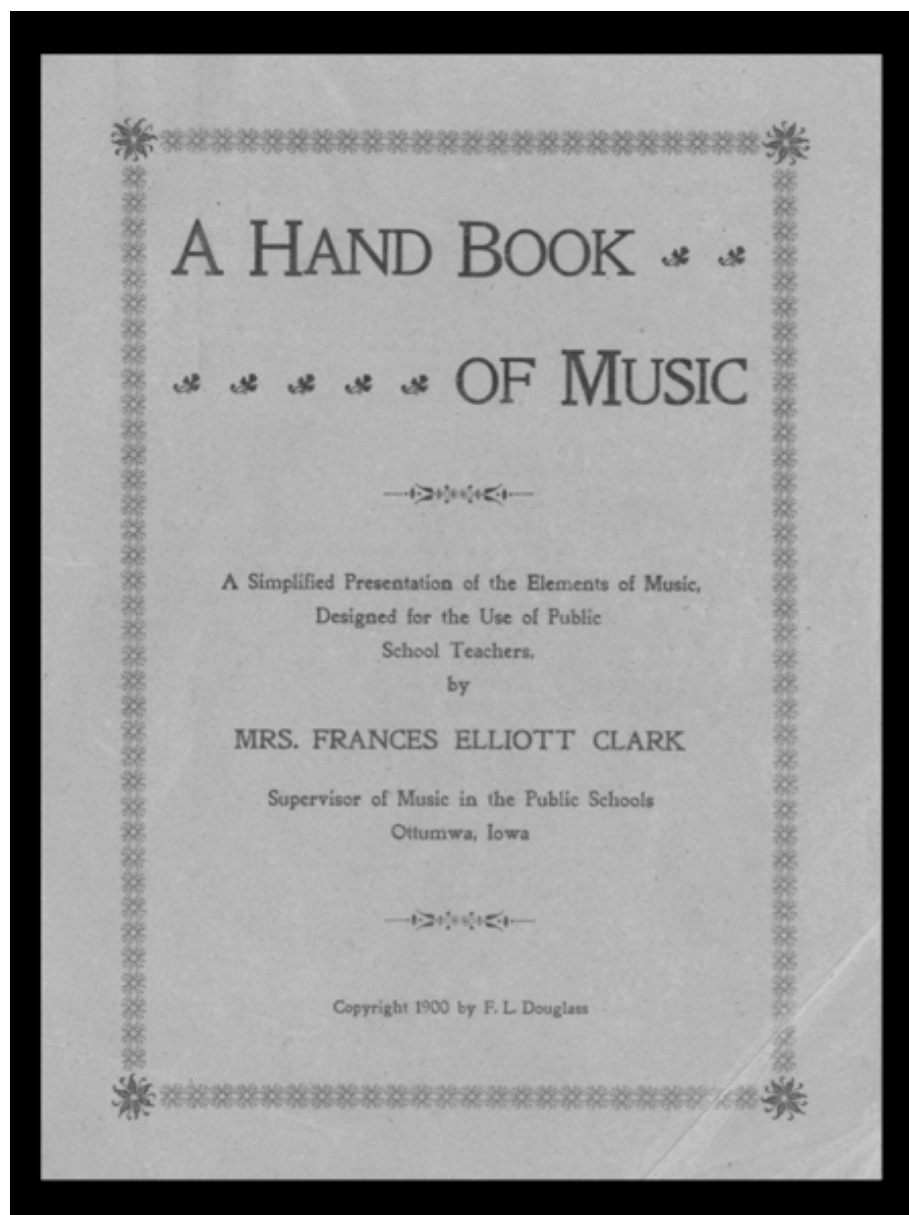


Figure 9. *A Hand Book of Music* (cover), courtesy of the Frances Elliott Clark Collection, NAFME Historical Center, Special Collections in Performing Arts, University of Maryland Libraries.

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company that held an annual summer institute in Chicago. See Debra Gordon Hedden, George N. Heller, Jere T. Humphreys and Valerie A. Slattery, "Alice Carey Inskeep (1875-1942): A Pioneering Iowa Music Educator and MENC Founding Member," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 55 (summer 2007): 134.

Crampton. In the previously mentioned *Normal Course of Lessons in Piano and Harmony given by the University Extension Method*, Clark's public school music course was publicized. Her 1911 *Prospectus of Public School Music Course* (see fig. 10), for example, offered one hundred lessons.

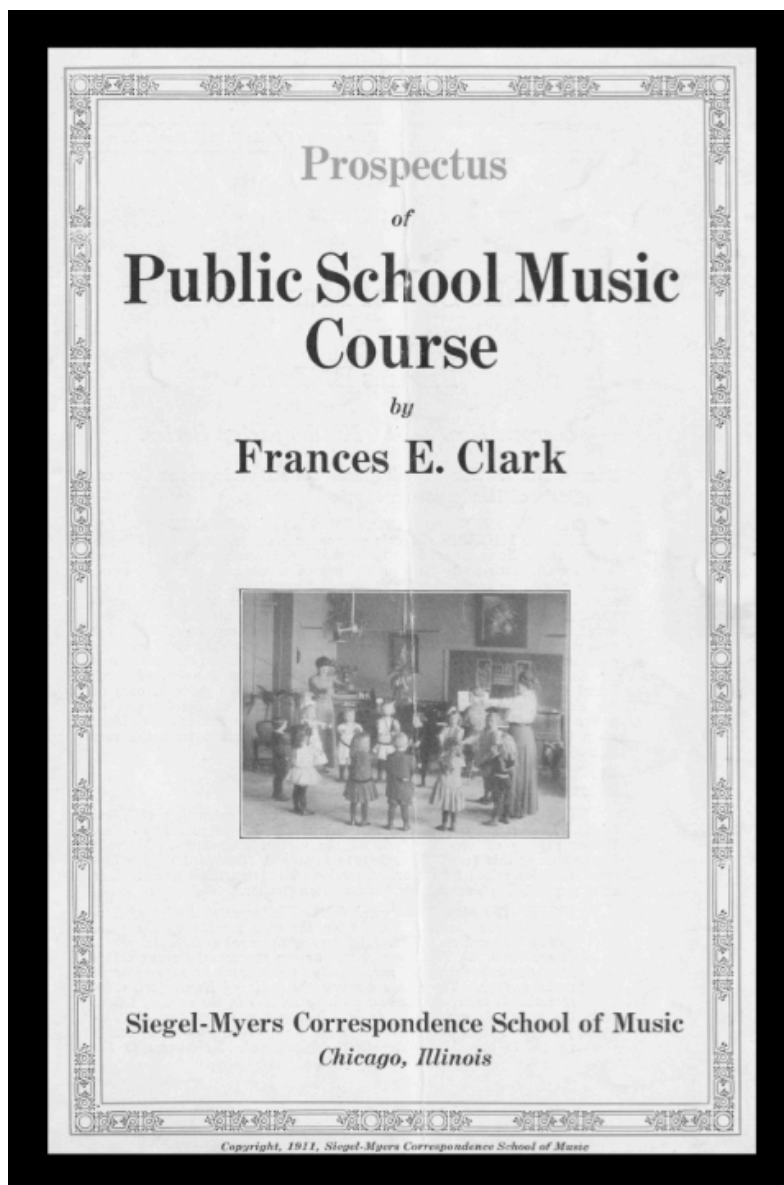


Figure 10. *Prospectus of Public School Music Course* (cover), courtesy of the Frances Elliott Clark Collection, NAFME Historical Center, Special Collections in Performing Arts, University of Maryland Libraries.

The eighth-grade lessons show the transition Clark was making as an advocate for music appreciation as the primary goal of music instruction. As shown in table 3, many of the lessons were performance based or focused on music fundamentals.<sup>237</sup> In Lesson 100, however, entitled “Music Appreciation and Community Music,” Clark’s work reflected the partial transformation of school-based music education from music making to intelligent listening:

Not long ago sight reading was the objective point in all of the music work; later it became tone quality and song material, and now it has developed into the question of actual knowledge of music appreciation. Emphasis is put not so much on the theory of music, as on the study of the real music itself, and the culture and growth in appreciation which comes from familiarity with the works of the great composers. Each of these objective points was in turn and in itself of value, but we are finally coming to see that the ultimate aim of all the music study is the ability to enjoy and appreciate the best music the world has.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Frances Elliott Clark, *Prospectus of Public School Music Course* (Chicago: Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, 1911): 14-15; Frances Elliott Clark Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Series 2.1, Box 4, Folder 2, Item 2.0, NAfME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>238</sup> Frances Elliott Clark, “Music Appreciation and Community Music,” Lesson No. 100 (Chicago: Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, 1911): 1; Frances Elliott Clark Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Series 2.1, Box 5, Folder 4, NAfME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

Table 3

Eighth-Grade Lesson Offerings (Nos. 86-100) from  
 Frances Elliott Clark's *Prospectus of Public School Music Course*

<i>Lesson No(s).</i>	<i>Subject Matter</i>
86	REVIEW COVERING BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE SUBJECTS IN THE PRECEDING LESSONS, NECESSARY TO THE WORK OF THE EIGHTH GRADE
87	SPECIAL ATTENTION TO TONE QUALITY AND CARE OF THE VOICE
88	CONTINUATION OF VOCAL DRILLS
89	NAMING THE TONES AND INTERVALS
90	SONG ANALYSIS
91	SONG ANALYSIS (Continued)
92	CHORUS WORK
93	INFLUENCE OF THE TEACHER UPON THE SUCCESS OF CHORUS SINGING
94 and 95	PREPARATION OF THE PUBLIC PROGRAM
96	SUGGESTIONS FOR NATIONAL PROGRAMS
97	SHADING AND EXPRESSION
98	TERMINOLOGY OF MUSIC
99 and 100	RELATION OF THE SCHOOL TO COMMUNITY LIFE

### Victor Talking Machine Company

The Victor Talking Machine Company was founded in 1901, but the idea for an education department for school music did not materialize until 1910. A Victor representative named Royden J. Keith attended a demonstration where Clark taught with Victor recordings in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in June of 1910. He reported favorably on Clark's teaching methods with Victor products to the company's Chicago distributor, A. D. Geissler. It was Geissler's father, Louis F. Geissler, a general manager for Victor in Camden, New Jersey, who met with

Clark to offer her a position as head of a new education department. She accepted the job opportunity in December of 1910 and started working for Victor in 1911.<sup>239</sup>

With Clark at the helm, Victor promoted music instruction via listening lessons that emphasized formal and historical concepts. In April of 1911, Clark spoke in Detroit shortly after the opening of the Victor Educational Department. In her address to the Music Supervisors National Conference,<sup>240</sup> Clark asserted that “The atmosphere is already created for a talk on the cultural side of music.”<sup>241</sup> The emphasis on music’s aesthetic qualities was also part of Charles Farnsworth’s approach to music instruction in his 1909 book *Education Through Music*.<sup>242</sup> The “atmosphere” Clark referred to was an early shift in the direction of teaching music appreciation and aesthetics, a movement fueled in large part by widespread economic and social forces such as urbanization and the expansion of the middle class that were beginning to influence education, collectively called the progressive education movement.<sup>243</sup> It likely was also being influenced (and made possible) by Edison’s phonograph, in addition to the player piano, which had found its way into at least some schools.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Keene, *A History of Music Education*, 265-70.

<sup>240</sup> Stoddard, “Frances Elliott Clark,” 88.

<sup>241</sup> Frances Elliott Clark, “Paper Read At Detroit” (paper read at the Music Supervisors National Conference, Detroit, MI, April, 1911); Frances Elliott Clark Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Series 1.1, Box 1, Folder 1, Item 1.0, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>242</sup> Jere T. Humphreys, “Applications of Science: The Age of Standardization and Efficiency in Music Education,” *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 9 (January 1988), 17.

<sup>243</sup> Humphreys, “Instrumental Music in American Education,” 40-41.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

One of the main ideas Clark advocated in her address was elevating the study of music history to a level equivalent to that of some core subjects: "... the study of the folk songs of any country [being] just as important as the study of its government—its wars—its cities—its arts and its sciences." She noted that teachers were recognizing "... the value of music as a mental activity—as an active spur to the imagination and of the higher value in the teaching of ethics and the proper control and expression of the emotions." She foresaw a time when the Victor Talking Machine would become as important in the classroom as a map or globe.<sup>245</sup>

In another paper read the following year in Chicago for The Department of School Administration of the National Education Association, Clark reported that Victor's purpose in education was to provide "... a way to bring to the hearing of the children and youth, a great wealth of educational matter, not otherwise available."<sup>246</sup> She thought that music learning was inhibited in the United States and kept from reaching its maximum educational potential "... because of the impossibility of having the children HEAR really good music."<sup>247</sup>

Limited by their own musical capabilities, the literature the students heard was restricted to what they could perform, Clark reminded them. Beyond that, due to "... the limitations of [the] child ... to grasp the grammar of the language, the field of endeavor has been pitifully small." To Clark, the phonograph lifted this restriction, and she made it clear that the machine

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<sup>245</sup> Clark, "Paper Read At Detroit."

<sup>246</sup> Clark, "The Talking Machine," 3.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. (Emphasis in original)



facilitated what was heretofore not feasible: "... the hearing of the real music before the study of its form and content, and during all the years of school work in music, it [the device] illustrates in concrete form every fact and theory given in lessons."<sup>248</sup> Noting the many advantages of the talking machine, Clark said:

It is simple, inexpensive, practical, portable, easily operated, and may go into every sort of place where children work and play and study, furnishing the practical help of accompanying the games, calisthenics, marching, folk-dancing, social and recreation center dancing, etc.<sup>249</sup>

For a time Clark believed that there were relatively few practical applications of the phonograph in the school, a belief she held even up until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. It seems, though, that she was unaware of how Edison's phonograph was being used in schools and how advancements in the quality of the phonograph in general were inspiring respected musicians to record their renditions of pieces for Edison, Victor, and presumably Columbia. Stoddard noted that "Mrs. Clark did not know that as early as 1903 some of the truly great artists were successfully recorded in both England and America, and that the famous [Victor] Red Seal Record Series began to be pressed in 1906."<sup>250</sup>

In her speech to the National Education Association in 1912, the year after she began her employment with Victor, Clark reported an exponential growth in the phonograph's "... daily use in more than 400 cities, in many of them, in every school."<sup>251</sup> She concluded her paper by stating:

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>250</sup> Stoddard, "Frances Elliott Clark," 74.

<sup>251</sup> Clark, "The Talking Machine," 5.

The possibilities are boundless, and no modern school can afford to be without its Talking Machine, any more than its library, its workshop, its kitchen or its laboratory. The Talking Machine has come into the education world to fill a real need and will, therefore, stay as an indispensable adjunct to the equipment of every school.<sup>252</sup>

As director of the Educational Department, Clark's work with Victor resulted in the production of a number of materials for school use, such as *A Graded List of Victor Records for Home and School* and *The Victrola in Rural Schools*.

In the former publication Clark wrote:

Many have long held the erroneous idea that to be musical implied great ability in performance and thereby relegated this most expressive of all languages to the few who, through some unusual gift or favored circumstance of birth or wealth, had the opportunity of cultivating the eye, voice or hand to the point of virtuosity.<sup>253</sup>

Thanks to what Clark regarded as the superiority and diversity of Victor's recordings, everyone could use them to enjoy and study music.

By the second decade of the twentieth century enjoying music through listening was beginning to be emphasized more than learning to sing, as evidenced in *The Victrola in Rural Schools*. In the foreword, Clark wrote about the "cultural arts" making their way into rural schools. "Now the Victrola and Victor Records bring all the best music of all the world to all the children," she proclaimed: "We may enjoy it, learn to sing some of it, play and dance to some of it, write to some of it, use it to illustrate geography, history, story or reading

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>253</sup> Victor Talking Machine Company, *A Graded List of Victor Records for Home and School* (Camden, NJ: Educational Department, 1918), 5; The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonograph-Record Bulletins-Catalogs, Victor Talk. Mach. Co., Box 2 of 3, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. The folder containing this document was in the last folder in the box, which was unlabelled.

lesson.”<sup>254</sup> This, however, was not always Clark’s goal, as may be observed in her writings prior to joining the Victor Talking Machine Company.

### **Thomas A. Edison, Inc. Questionnaires**

A large number of the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaires housed at the University of Michigan contain information about Edison’s main competitor, The Victor Talking Machine Company. The responses by Edison owners, which began in 1921, centered on three issues related to the Victor company: (1) preference for Edison products (mainly their phonographs), (2) dissatisfaction with Edison artists, and (3) unhappiness with the timeliness of Edison’s releases of the latest popular songs. Some submissions elicited responses from the vice president of Thomas A. Edison, Inc., William Maxwell, who provided details about some of the company’s philosophies and operations.

One customer, L. P. Hoops, disclosed that he was oftentimes “... compelled to buy the Victor records to get the latest tunes, which [he objected] to very much for the Edison record [was] so much better.”<sup>255</sup> Maxwell’s response revealed that the company was improving in terms of making hits available in a timely fashion. “[The company has] recently gotten out several numbers ahead of the talking machine people,” he pointed out, thanks to “... the installation of a

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<sup>254</sup> Victor Talking Machine Company, *The Victrola in Rural Schools* (Camden, NJ: Educational Department, 1919), 5-6; The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonograph-Gen. Info., Magnavox-Victrola, Box 2 of 3, Folder: Victor-Victrola, NAFME Historical Center, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>255</sup> L. P. Hoops, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 02 April 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

special department, now nearly completed, for handling hits." Maxwell concluded by stating, "I think you will be more than pleased with our speed."<sup>256</sup>

M. K. W. expressed the frustration of some owners when he noted, "Edison surely has the best machine but Victor makes the best records."<sup>257</sup> These types of replies provoked stern responses from the Thomas A. Edison, Inc.

Record Service Department:

Please do not confuse or compare Edison RE-CREATIONS with talking machine records. The manufacture of the latter is a very simple mechanical process, requiring only a short time to complete the cycle of production; while Edison RE-CREATIONS mean an involved laboratory process calling for great care and skill. Briefly, one process results in a hastily made mechanical musical imitation and the other the work of artists actually and faithfully RE-CREATED. That this difference is fully appreciated by Edison owners is evidenced by the fact that they realize it requires a little more time to make the RE-CREATIONS and are willing to wait for them.<sup>258</sup>

W. E. Slocum was one of the owners who believed in the quality of Edison merchandise. He believed there was no comparison "... between an Edison phonograph and a talking machine with which the country is now flooded ...." Slocum could easily distinguish the differences between the two competitors' products: "I just can't see how people can be satisfied with anything but the best when it comes to something musical, and the best sure spells Edison."<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> William Maxwell, response to L. P. Hoops, 11 April 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>257</sup> M. K. W., response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 20 January 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. This respondent's last name is illegible. However, initials were provided for the first and middle names as "M. K.," and the last name begins with the letter "W."

<sup>258</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc. Record Service Department, response to Mr. A. B. Smith, 08 February 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. (Emphasis in original)

<sup>259</sup> W. E. Slocum, letter included with response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 16 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

Recording artists also proved to be an issue with Edison owners. Mrs. Oliver Wallace declared, "What all Edison owners want is records by our great artists. We all have to buy Victor records when we get them and how much we would like to hear a real recreation of them. Get them and in everyway [*sic*] the Edison will be best."<sup>260</sup> William Maxwell's response may have surprised some Edison owners: "Will you believe me, when I tell you that the particular talking machine manufacturer in question has only three artists, whom we should like to have?"<sup>261</sup>

This type of grievance helped explain why Edison appears to have struggled in the school market. Similar to Edison's lack of "great artists," there was an insufficient amount of literature about Edison's products for schools, especially when compared to Victor. G. C. Silzer, the vice president of an Edison dealer named Harger & Blish, wrote about the need "... of some well gotten up literature from [Edison's] company on the subject 'Of the Edison in the School'." Silzer wanted a "... good circular setting forth the features of the Edison as applied to school work." Silzer closed his letter of April 26, 1915 by emphasizing:

The average small town dealer finds him-self [*sic*] terribly frustrated as a general thing, when in competition on a school deal, by reason of the profusion of the advise [*sic*], suggestions[,] etc[.], contained in literature which the Victor company supply [*sic*] his competitor.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Mrs. Oliver Wallace, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 02 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>261</sup> William Maxwell, response to Mrs. J. L. Mead, 20 January 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>262</sup> G. C. Silzer, letter to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., April 26, 1915, William Maxwell Files, Box 1, Folder: May 1915, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

Maxwell's response showed, in part, why Victor may have dominated the school market:

Within the past week Mr. Edison has come to a definite conclusion concerning records for school use and will proceed with a series of special records. Therefore, for the time being I do not think that it would be advisable for us to get out a special pamphlet for the use of dealers in schools, but as soon as we can announce Mr. Edison's school records we shall of course prepare suitable literature.<sup>263</sup>

C. E. Barrett, from Entiat, Washington, returned his questionnaire with a letter in which he stated that he was selling phonographs for Mr. H. E. Roberts, an agent located in Wenatchee, Washington. In this correspondence he related the difficulties of obtaining sales as a result of the competition generated by Victor's educational products. Barrett complained that Edison had no recreations classified for educational purposes; consequently, he requested products of this type, so "... we could meet them on an equal footing in this line."<sup>264</sup>

Victor was not the only company referenced in his letter. Barrett also mentioned that Columbia made educational products. Regardless of the competition, though, he projected:

The superiority of the Edison would be very apperant [*sic*] to the most skeptical after seeing a fair comperison [*sic*], and if there is one place, as I see it, we should make a special effirt [*sic*] to place Edisons in schools, to give the plastic minds of the young the true interpitation [*sic*] of music.<sup>265</sup>

In closing, Barrett offered his service to help in whatever way possible, and

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<sup>263</sup> William Maxwell, letter to G. C. Silzer, May 01, 1915, William Maxwell Files, Box 1, Folder: May 1915, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>264</sup> C. E. Barrett, letter included with response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 21 February 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

asked that his letter be received in a kind spirit.

Maxwell found Barrett's letter interesting and responded with promising information. In his correspondence dated March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921, Maxwell revealed: "We are at present developing some plans for school work and I think they will meet with your approval."<sup>266</sup> The very next day, in fact, Maxwell was scheduled to meet with educators of "international reputation," and he anticipated the establishment of a "school research department."<sup>267</sup>

### **School Research Department**

The school research department was indeed established, and it seems to have materialized to some degree as a result of the work of Walter V. Bingham, who was mentioned in the prologue of this document. William R. Lee, in his dissertation entitled "Education Through Music: The Life and Work of Charles Hubert Farnsworth (1859-1947)," reported that a colleague of Bingham named Esther L. Gatewood established an office named "Edison Music Research" in New York.<sup>268</sup> While there, she worked to produce material for school music with the noted music educator Charles Farnsworth, who was hired in 1921 to head this newly formed educational endeavor. Lee noted these strategic measures by Thomas A. Edison, Inc. were "... competitive responses to a much larger and

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<sup>266</sup> William Maxwell, response to C. E. Barrett, 15 March 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. Maxwell did not disclose information concerning the participants who were to attend this meeting or where it would take place, only that the school research department was to be "... in [the] charge of one of the best men in the country," presumably Charles H. Farnsworth (see the next section in this chapter, entitled "School Research Department").

<sup>268</sup> While the exact year of the opening of this office was not found, it was probably around 1920, the year in which Bingham was hired by Edison, as mentioned in the prologue of the present document.

more successful effort by Edison Phonograph's archrival the Victor Company."<sup>269</sup> Clearly, Edison was trying to catch up to Victor in the school music arena, a company that, though younger, had founded its education department ten years earlier (1911).

Like Frances Elliott Clark, Charles H. Farnsworth figures prominently in music education history, and his career accomplishments have been frequently treated in the literature. William R. Lee's dissertation referenced earlier in this chapter constitutes the most complete account of Farnsworth's life and career. An abridged version of his professional activities leading up to his time with Edison's School Research Department is provided below.

Charles H. Farnsworth started his teaching career in Massachusetts as a private piano instructor in 1881, in addition to coaching church choirs. He continued the same lines of work when he moved to Colorado in 1888. While there, he also obtained a part-time appointment at the University of Colorado in Boulder to teach singing classes. In 1891, he started working in the public schools of Boulder, while maintaining his teaching duties at the university.<sup>270</sup>

After many professional successes throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century in Colorado, Farnsworth accepted a faculty position at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City in 1900. According to Lee, this is where a forty-one year-old Farnsworth would develop a "national reputation as a leading music educator" by building a teacher education

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<sup>269</sup> Lee, "Education Through Music," 94-96.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.



program, by espousing an aesthetic approach to music education, and by assuming leadership roles in music education organizations.<sup>271</sup>

Unlike Clark, Farnsworth was not present at the historic music education meeting in Keokuk, Iowa in 1907. Nevertheless, he became part of the Music Supervisors National Conference around 1912, and he held leadership roles in the organization, such as charter membership in the group's Educational Council that was planned in 1918.<sup>272</sup>

Farnsworth was influenced to a certain extent by what Jere Humphreys termed "the scientific movement in music education" in his article entitled "Applications of Science: The Age of Standardization and Efficiency in Music Education." Humphreys reported that "An increasing awareness of science by music educators manifested itself also in the actions of certain individuals who sought to establish closer ties to the field of psychology." One of these individuals was Charles Farnsworth, whose scientific and psychological inclinations probably appealed to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., which, as indicated in the prologue of the present document, contracted with the psychologist Walter V. Bingham.<sup>273</sup>

In a similar fashion to Victor's education department under the direction of Frances E. Clark, the Edison school research department under Charles Farnsworth produced items for the school music market that promoted the tenets

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>272</sup> Lee, "Education Through Music," 89-90; and Hedden et al., "Alice Carey Inskeep," 136.

<sup>273</sup> Humphreys, "Applications of Science," 15.

of learning to appreciate music. One such publication was entitled *Golden Treasury: Book I The Effective Use of the Small Library* (see fig. 11).

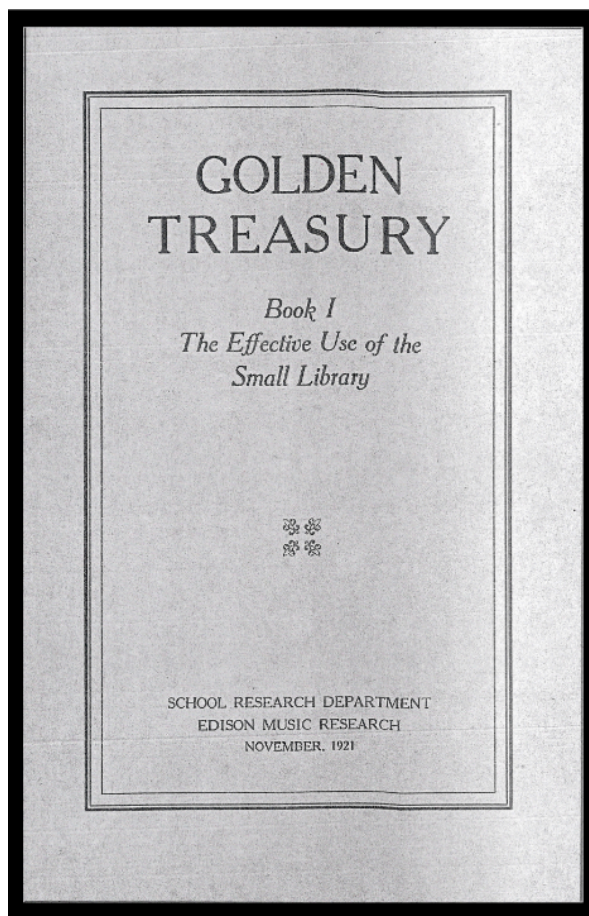


Figure 11. *Golden Treasury: Book I The Effective Use of the Small Library* (cover), courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

William Maxwell mentioned this book in a letter to a Mr. T. G. Tabb, who responded to the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaire on January 31, 1921.<sup>274</sup> On February 22, 1921, Maxwell informed Mr. Tabb of the following:

<sup>274</sup> F. G. Tabb, response to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., questionnaire, 31 January 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. Mr. Tabb's first initial was mistakenly typed as a "T" in Maxwell's response, when, in fact, Mr. Tabb's first initial was an "F."

For over a year, we have had Dr. Bingham of Carnegie [Carnegie Mellon University], Dr. Farnsworth of Columbia [University, not the record company], and others, engaged in research work for the purpose of developing programs of music, and the booklet called "The Golden Treasury of Music", which is the result of their research, will be ready for the printer before very long. Perhaps I should not say that these are programs, they are really classifications which enable the owner of a New Edison to make up programs to suit whatever particular mood he happens to be in.<sup>275</sup>

Maxwell's response is particularly helpful in identifying the authorship of *Golden Treasury*. While Gatewood's name clearly distinguished her remarks, the names of the writers of the remainder of the book are not as evident. Even though Maxwell indicated that *Golden Treasury* was the product of research by Bingham, Farnsworth, and others, the two named individuals will be cited as the authors herein.

In Gatewood's short opening section, she noted that this writing was the first installment of a series, the focus of the first book being to "... stimulate interest in music, and to show how even a small library, if carefully chosen, may become the basis of much interesting study and long continued enjoyment."<sup>276</sup> After noting that teachers would discover engaging and productive material for the classroom, Gatewood informed readers that help was available and suggestions for utilization could be obtained by writing to the Edison Music Research division in New York City.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> William Maxwell, letter to Mr. T. G. Tabb, 22 February 1921, collection of the University of Michigan Libraries, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>276</sup> School Research Department, *Golden Treasury: Book I The Effective Use of the Small Library* (New York: Edison Music Research, November 1921), 2; Primary Printed-Edison Comp., EDIS-54100, Box 47, School Res. Dept., U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Book I covers a wide variety of topics, with chapters devoted to Norwegian and Russian musics, folk music, the many influences that resulted in American music, musical enjoyment, music and feeling, and on putting together programs to be performed by the phonograph, among others. The introduction, written by Farnsworth,<sup>278</sup> began with a comparison of spoken language to musical language, highlighting how different cultures, such as those from the Orient, have different musical languages, in contrast, for example, to the one employed by some Europeans and Americans. When discussing the differences between spoken and musical languages, Farnsworth acknowledged that while words have meanings that can be understood,

... [M]usical language uses tones, that do not stand for ideas like words, but produce beautiful motions (for we speak of how the melody or harmony “goes”), and when we enjoy this movement of the music we understand it; so to understand music we do not need to translate but simply to perceive the beauty of its motion.<sup>279</sup>

Emphasis was placed on the potential of listeners to remember musical events in a work. Farnsworth noted that while people do not share the same proclivity to retain and intelligently associate previously heard musical information, they can improve their “... musical memories by attention and thought, and thus get enjoyment from a lot of music that otherwise would mean nothing to [them].”<sup>280</sup>

The aforementioned material, addressing different types of music, comprises Part I of the book. In Part II, enjoying music is the subject matter,

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<sup>278</sup> Lee, “Education Through Music,” 95 (note 1).

<sup>279</sup> School Research Department, *Golden Treasury*, 5.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

beginning with the sixth chapter, entitled “The Four Bases of Musical Enjoyment.” Bingham and Farnsworth devoted two pages in the book to this topic, listing the following elements as the four sources of musical enjoyment: (1) Physical, (2) Satisfaction, (3) Associational, and (4) Ideational.

The first component highlighted the physical movements that occurred as a result of the all-inclusive participatory, communal nature of folk music. Over time, though, Bingham and Farnsworth noted that physical acts became less noticeable as the focus shifted to listening. Satisfaction with certain instruments and voices was described next as well as the ways people associated events with music. The final aspect centered on how experience in listening to music correlates with noticing new things in music, including how a song is interpreted in performance.<sup>281</sup>

The four parts of chapter VII of the book are devoted to elements of music: (1) Rhythm, (2) Melody, (3) Harmony, and (4) Timbre. Bingham and Farnsworth explained that the study of these elements was essential for performers and composers, but grasping them also made listening to music enjoyable.<sup>282</sup>

The last chapter of this part of the book deals with music and feeling, where the emphasis on the way music makes a listener feel is tied back to the previously mentioned four musical elements:

... [F]eelings are related to certain musical elements which we have already discussed. Music with a decided rhythm not only stimulates bodily activity, but it also makes one feel happy, gay, or stirred. Music in which melody is most conspicuous usually gives a feeling of satisfaction and also quiets or rests the listener. Some types of melody, especially

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

when accompanied by rich harmony, may also make him feel serious or sad. Certain kinds of instrument and voice qualities are as important in creating the devotional attitude as are the words of a song. Sometimes we experience the devotional attitude just as well without the words.<sup>283</sup>

Bingham and Farnsworth even stated that “Every good piece of music makes you feel different from the way you felt before you heard the music and each piece of music arouses a particular feeling.”<sup>284</sup>

Another booklet, entitled “Birthdays of Favorite Composers,” outlines Edison’s favorite composers and some of their respective works (see fig. 12). It was produced and distributed by The School Department of Thomas A. Edison Music Research in New York City.<sup>285</sup> The composers listed for each month of the year are shown in table 4.

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> The School Department, *Birthdays of Favorite Composers* (New York: Thomas A. Edison Music Research, [n.d]): [n.p.]; Primary Printed-Edison Comp., EDIS-54100, Box 47, School Res. Dept., 780.92, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX. While the authorship of this booklet is not evident, it was presumably a collaborative product of Bingham, Farnsworth, and Gatewood. The booklet also has no identifiable page numbers.

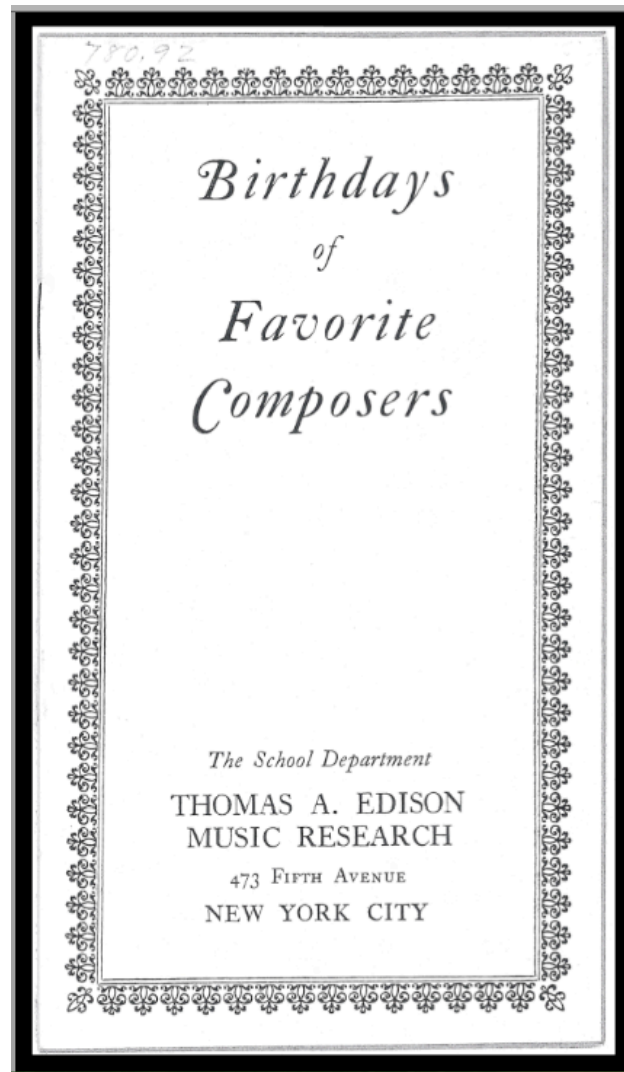


Figure 12. *Birthdays of Favorite Composers* (cover), courtesy of U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park.

Table 4

List of Composers in Edison's *Birthdays of Favorite Composers*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Composer 1</i>	<i>Composer 2</i>
January	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Franz Peter Schubert
February	Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy	George Frederick Händel
March	Pablo de Sarasate	Franz Joseph Haydn
April	Franz von Suppé	Friedrich von Flotow
May	Jules Emile Frédéric Massenet	Richard Wagner
June	Edward Hagerup Grieg	Charles François Gounod
July	Henri Wieniawski	n/a
August	Benjamin Louis Godard	n/a
September	Giacomo Meyerbeer	Anton Dvorák
October	Guiseppe Verdi	Charles Camille Saint-Saëns
November	Vinc. Bellini	Gaetano Donizetti
December	Pietro Mascagni	Carl Maria von Weber

The purpose of this booklet was to promote celebrated composers and music history. Based on the premises that people enjoy celebrating special occasions and that school-age children relate to birthdays, the brochure included the following statement: "We have chosen these composers' birthdays, not as days in themselves, but merely to suggest a time when we shall give special attention to each one individually and to his compositions."<sup>286</sup> Given limited space in the pamphlet, the reader was directed to other books for more information, such as the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, *Face to Face with Great Musicians* by Isaacson, Krehbiel's *A Book of Operas*, Paine and Klauser's

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.



*Famous Composers and their Works*, and Parry's *Studies of Great Composers*.<sup>287</sup>

Along with these works, other books were recommended that would "... prove invaluable in helping one to learn how to listen and how to enjoy music." These "handibooks" were Dickinson's *The Art of Listening, Music Appreciation* by Hamilton, Henderson's *What Is Good Music, The Appreciation of Music* by Surette and Mason, Tapper's *First Studies in Music Biography*, and Upton's *Standard Musical Biographies* and *Standard Operas*.<sup>288</sup>

Musical enjoyment and the education of feeling were important selling points for both Edison's School Research Department, led by Charles H. Farnsworth, and the Victor Talking Machine Company's Educational Division, under the direction of Frances E. Clark. This sort of rhetoric, however, appeared a decade earlier in Clark's work for Victor than in the Edison materials, where Farnsworth was in charge.

## Conclusions

It is informative to observe the progression toward listening-based music education in the writings of Frances Elliott Clark and in the publications of

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<sup>287</sup> George Grove, *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878); Charles D. Isaacson, *Face to Face with Great Musicians* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1921); Henry Edward Krehbiel, *A Book of Operas* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1920); *Famous Composers and their Works*, ed. by John Knowles Paine, Theodore Thomas, and Karl Klauser (Boston: J. B. Millet Company, 1891); and C. Hubert H. Parry, *Studies of Great Composers* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1904).

<sup>288</sup> The School Department, *Birthdays*, [n.p.]. Edward Dickinson, *The Art of Listening to & Appreciating Good Music* (London: Reeves, 1910); Clarence G. Hamilton, *Music Appreciation* (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1920); W. J. Henderson, *What Is Good Music?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898); Thomas Whitney Surette and Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Appreciation of Music* (New York: The H. W. Gray Co., 1907); Thomas Tapper, *First Studies in Music Biography* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., 1900); George P. Upton, *Standard Musical Biographies* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910); and George P. Upton, *The Standard Operas* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1890).

Edison's phonograph companies. By the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, the shift in Clark's mindset seems to have solidified, as evidenced by comparing her publications for the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music to those for the Victor Talking Machine Company. Eugene Stoddard, in his dissertation about Clark, noted this change when he included the thoughts of her son, John Elliott Clark, from a personal interview.

Commenting upon Clark's completion of her public school music course for Siegel-Myers just prior to beginning her position at Victor, Stoddard wrote that when Clark arrived at Victor's office in Camden, New Jersey "... she was assigned to a desk and given a scratch pad and pencil with which to lay the foundation for a new era in music education."<sup>289</sup>

When Clark began working for Victor in 1911, she may have been unaware of the impact the phonograph was already having in schools as a result of the Edison phonograph. As noted earlier, material for the Edison phonograph in the classroom, for example, was created as early as 1893. Throughout much of the first two decades of the twentieth century, moreover, evidence of the use of Edison's phonograph in school music was documented in the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*.

The success that Victor had with Frances Elliott Clark, however, helped to influence a shift in the approach employed by Thomas A. Edison, Inc. in marketing the company's products for school music by creating the School Research Department and by hiring Charles Farnsworth. In 1921, Thomas A.

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<sup>289</sup> Stoddard, "Frances Elliott Clark," 84.

Edison, Inc. tried to compete with Victor using essentially the same aesthetic approach to music education formulated with Clark a decade earlier, albeit from more of a psychological perspective. While Thomas A. Edison, through the invention of the phonograph and his promotion of learning music with the phonograph's recording feature, and Frances Elliott Clark, by way of promoting listening-based music education with Victor recordings, were both important catalysts for new eras in music education, it is likely that the new philosophical approach of appreciation-based music instruction would not have materialized without the influence of the progressive education movement and the effects of mechanical musical instruments such as the player piano that preceded Edison's phonograph. However, the tenets of progressivism and the existence of the player piano aside, the phonograph proved so versatile and readily available that it helped shift general music (that is, music instruction for the general student) from sight-singing to a combination of performance and listening.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Humphreys, "Instrumental Music in American Education," 43-49. See also Jere T. Humphreys, "United States of America: Reflections on the Development and Effectiveness of Compulsory Music Education," in *The Origins and Foundations of Music Education: Cross-Cultural Historical Studies in Compulsory Schooling*, eds. Gordon Cox and Robin Stevens (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 128.

## EPILOGUE

*For music I know that you will simply laugh when I tell you what I have done with the two instruments that I have finished. I have got the playing of an orchestra so perfectly that each instrument can be heard distinct from the rest; you can even tell the difference between two pianos of different makes; you can tell the voice of one singer from another; you can get a reproduction of an operatic scene in which the orchestra, the choruses and the soloists will be as distinct and as satisfactory as opera in this sort of miniature can ever be made.*

—Thomas Alva Edison<sup>291</sup>

Today, it is sometimes taken for granted how easily sound can be captured and played back by modern recording technology. Edison must have felt jubilation when he was able to distinguish between various orchestral sections, instruments of the same type, and the voices of individual singers, all important milestones in the development of the phonograph. Not only is it feasible to record at a professional level as a result of Edison's work, he also provided the necessary means by which novices and amateurs could record.

Edison's penchant for music was evident throughout his life and career. He saw music as essential to the cultivation of the mind, expressing the conviction that "Mere existence demands nothing but food, drink, clothing and shelter. But when you attempt to raise existence to a higher plane, you have to nourish the brain as well as the body."<sup>292</sup> Even though he believed that a quarter of the people in the country did not read with any significant ambition after completing school, Edison reasoned that any person of sound mind would not

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<sup>291</sup> The Thomas Edison Papers, "Wizard Edison Talks," [database on-line]; available from <http://edison.rutgers.edu/NamesSearch/SingleDoc.php3?DocId=SM030026a&searchDoc=Enter>, accessed on (20 July 2012), TAED, SM030026a [Document ID], SM030 [Folder ID], Image 53 of 53, Rutgers; Internet. The article begins on the left hand page of the scrapbook.

<sup>292</sup> Thomas A. Edison, quoted in *Edison and Music*, 13.

disagree that books were crucial for sustaining American civilization. Music was so important to Edison that he even elevated it above literature, "... for the very simple reason that music is capable of releasing in practically every human mind, enlightening and ennobling thoughts that literature evokes in only the most erudite minds."<sup>293</sup>

One of Edison's sons, Charles, explained that the piano was the sole musical instrument his father could play, and that only to a very limited degree. Despite his father being a layperson in terms of technical musicianship, Charles believed:

There are few people, however, who have listened to a larger variety of musical selections, as he was in the habit of buying sheet music, literally by the ton, and wearing out his pianist as he listened to various compositions for hours at a time.<sup>294</sup>

Charles then called to mind that the phonograph was his father's favorite invention, and "... it was to the development of this that he turned his attention from time to time during its active life, from 1896 until 1927." In summarizing his father's attempts to balance his musical tastes with those of the public, Charles said:

Of course, to a certain extent, he had to give the public what they demanded in music, but I believe that he made a sincere effort to raise the standards as much as possible by releasing some things for which there was not great demand but through which he thought the public could be led to appreciate better music and by refusing now and then, much to the consternation of some of his business executives, to approve selections which he considered definitely below standard.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Charles Edison, "My Father and Music," 113.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

Edison's approach in this regard, though, ultimately failed, as Thomas A. Edison, Inc. stopped manufacturing phonographs and recordings in 1929, two years before his death on October 18, 1931.

Centennial issues of *The Etude* and the *Music Educators Journal* in February of 1947 that marked the one-hundredth anniversary of Edison's birth contained articles about his influence on music and music education through his invention and development of the phonograph. In *The Etude* editorial entitled "The Mind That Carried Music to Millions," James Francis Cooke wrote that "... during the twentieth century no man has had a greater part in the dissemination of music than Thomas A. Edison."<sup>296</sup> Paul W. Mathews' contribution to the Edison centennial edition of the *Music Educators Journal*, "Edison's First Great Gift to Education," included the following commendation: "In 1877, when his first phonograph patents were registered, the way was paved for the development of an instrument which would become a great adjunct to music education."<sup>297</sup>

Even in recent times Thomas Edison remains culturally relevant. In July 2010, *Time Magazine* dedicated a special history issue to his life and work. "From the time of Benjamin Franklin," a writer noted, "'inventor' has been a very American thing to be, and the most inventive of them all was Edison."<sup>298</sup> In "The Incredible Talking Machine," Randall Stross documented some potential names of the phonograph that he located in a logbook in Edison's laboratory. "In the end," he wrote, "they named it the phonograph. But it might have been called

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<sup>296</sup> James Francis Cooke, "The Mind That Carried Music to Millions," *The Etude* 65 (February 1947): 80.

<sup>297</sup> Paul W. Mathews, "Edison's First Great Gift to Education," *Music Educators Journal* 33 (February-March 1947): 25.

<sup>298</sup> "The Making of America: Thomas Edison," *Time Magazine*, July 5, 2010, 39.

the omphlegraph, meaning ‘voice writer.’ Or the antiphone (back talker). Or the didaskophone (portable teacher).”<sup>299</sup> A “portable teacher,” indeed, it turned out to be, especially for music education.

These and other tributes and discussions notwithstanding, the contributions of Thomas A. Edison and his phonograph businesses to music education remain largely undocumented. Although much has been written about Edison, there are no significant studies addressing his contributions to formal music education. I therefore documented a small portion of this history, primarily by examining two archives and one university library: Thomas Edison National Historical Park in West Orange, New Jersey, the NAFME Historical Center at the University of Maryland at College Park, and the Music Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Sources used in this study clearly show Edison’s involvement and interest, both directly and indirectly, in music instruction. Moreover, the study sheds light on some of the methods used to educate and train people in music during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and some of the ways in which Edison contributed to their dissemination.

This investigation therefore helps fill gaps in the literature on Thomas A. Edison and his contributions to music education. The music education community now has a long overdue introductory study that chronicles some of the interactions of the inventor of the phonograph with music instruction, and acknowledges his rightful place in music education history.

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<sup>299</sup> Randall Stross, “The Incredible Taking Machine,” *Time Magazine*, July 5, 2010, 48.

## Discussion

Discussion of Research Question 1: *In what ways did Thomas A. Edison contribute to music education?*

On the broadest level, Edison's invention of the phonograph is his greatest contribution to music education. At its unveiling at the office of the *Scientific American* magazine shortly after its invention, Edison predicted the future use of the device as a music teacher. Many of the ways in which his prophecy was fulfilled have been discussed by other writers, mainly the influences of a successor and competitor company, the Victor Talking Machine Company, whose education department was under the direction of music educator Frances E. Clark. The present work documents some of the earlier history of the phonograph, including evolutions in the Edison companies, the phonograph itself, and the companies' marketing efforts related to music education. The study then moves on to cover some of the period of competition with Victor and a third competitor, Columbia.

As one of the world's most prolific inventors, Edison could not dedicate his energies solely to any one field, yet the fact remains that the phonograph was his favorite invention. He returned to further improve and perfect the device several times during his career. His efforts resulted in incalculable benefits to music teachers, performers, ethnomusicologists, composers, and other musicians who became able to aurally document and play back their performances and those of others, their own musical works and those of others, including those from different cultures, and countless other applications.



Edison's contributions to music education beyond his invention of the phonograph as a play back device lay in his machine's ability to record at the direction of amateur users, something his main competitor's device could not do. Indeed, some of Edison's most visionary words of leadership referenced the machine's use as a recording instrument. Edison was a strong advocate for the cylinder phonograph, and in formal music education, the instructional benefits of the recording capability of this type of machine are clearly evident in surviving sources related to The Edison School Phonograph as well as to the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music.

The successful efforts by Thomas Edison to carry out his vision for his phonograph to be a music teacher were not enough, however, to adequately compete with other companies in the music education market. As mentioned previously, Edison was not able, nor did he have the desire, to devote his complete attention to the phonograph in general or to its use in music education specifically, a fact that has lessened his standing in the music education community. All of this, though, should be considered within the context that without Edison, there would be no phonograph or, perhaps, no Victor Talking Machine Company.

Discussion of Research Questions 2-4: *In what ways did Edison's phonograph companies contribute to music education? How, and to whom, did Edison's phonograph companies market their phonographs and other music education products? How did*

*Edison's approach to music instruction via the phonograph differ from that of Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company?*

Edison's work as an individual is somewhat difficult to separate from the work of his companies in that the labor of the individual and the company were intimately intertwined. "But more than a simple series of inventions," noted Bryan Walsh, "Edison's most lasting contribution might be in the system of industrial invention he helped pioneer."<sup>300</sup> Writing for the special history edition of *Time Magazine*, Walsh thought that "Edison's true genius lay in his ability to bring mass brainpower to the process of invention—and then to market the resulting devices with the deep pools of capital just forming in late 19th century America."<sup>301</sup> What Walsh described may certainly be observed with the phonograph. As explained in chapter 1 of the present document, Edison entrusted John Kreusi with bringing his idea for the phonograph to fruition. The marketing of the product was handled by numerous companies, two of which were highlighted in this work: The National Phonograph Company and Thomas A. Edison, Inc.

In what ways did Edison's phonograph companies contribute to music education? Materials that appeared in the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, as described in the second chapter of the present document, provided insights into the ways in which Edison's phonograph companies contributed to music education. That publication contained material about how the phonograph was utilized in formal music education. It also provided references to brochures and

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<sup>300</sup> Bryan Walsh, "The Electrifying Edison," *Time Magazine*, July 5, 2010, 42.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

instructional materials aimed toward helping musicians record themselves and others. The opportunity to examine and critique a musical performance apart from the technical mechanics offered the unique advantage of being able “to hear ourselves as others hear us.” It is also important to acknowledge that the phonograph greatly affected music learning in the home by allowing people to hear their own performances as well as the musical renditions of great artists, examples of which have been evidenced by several responses to the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaires quoted earlier in this document.

How, and to whom, did Edison’s phonograph companies market their phonographs and other music education products? Company advertisements show a concerted effort to reach women, children, and amateur musicians. The recording feature of Edison’s phonograph was promoted heavily. The Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaires and the company’s replies to some respondents reveal how the company marketed its products, as well as some of the thoughts of employees in the Record Service Department and William Maxwell, the company vice president. Edison’s phonograph companies marketed both home and school uses of the phonograph for music instruction via the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music and the Edison School Phonograph, respectively.

How did Edison’s approach to music instruction via the phonograph differ from that of Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company? The most obvious differences related to the recording feature of the Edison phonograph that was unavailable on Victor’s talking machine. This

characteristic was capitalized upon by the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, which offered customized recordings for vocal instruction, as opposed to having a student attempt to learn to sing by listening to and imitating a singer on a recording of an operatic aria, for example.<sup>302</sup>

Musical enjoyment and the education of feelings were strategies of both the Victor Talking Machine Company's Educational Division and Edison's School Research Department. With the publications of *Golden Treasury: Book I The Effective Use of the Small Library* and "Birthdays of Favorite Composers," for instance, Edison's School Research Department did, in large measure, emulate the approach of Victor's Educational Division, although it seems that the former emerged from the budding field of music psychology. It appears that the formation of Edison Music Research was the direct result of work by the psychologist Walter V. Bingham, and furthered by Esther L. Gatewood and Charles H. Farnsworth. Lee pointed out in relation to Farnsworth that "As modest as these efforts were, they represented one of the first attempts by a key individual in music education to participate directly in psychological research in music."<sup>303</sup>

### Suggestions for Future Research

In their book entitled *Doing History: Research and Writing in the Digital Age*, Michael J. Galgano, J. Chris Arndt, and Raymond M. Hyser convey that "The

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<sup>302</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., "More About Voice Culture with the Phonograph," [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 9 (July 1911): 7, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>303</sup> Lee, "Education Through Music," 97.

completion of the paper does not end the process; rather, it begins the next stage in an ongoing conversation about the past.”<sup>304</sup> This remains true regarding Thomas A. Edison and music education, as there are numerous ways to continue the research on his contributions to the field. “If others choose to do so, they can be guided by the work to build on or modify its conclusions,” according to Galgano, Arndt, and Hyser.<sup>305</sup>

A thorough study of the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music is recommended. A biographical study of George Crampton that includes an assessment of his teaching methods would also be beneficial. Further examination of his lessons that were aided by the phonograph could prove useful, especially if recordings of his students could be located and analyzed.

Researching other correspondence schools that offered distance education in the first quarter of the twentieth century might prove fruitful also. In addition to the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, the Langenus Clarinet Correspondence School with Talking Machine Records and the Warren Military Band School offered distance instruction in music. Some individuals also offered music lessons via correspondence, including Rudolph Toll of Boston, who taught a course in clarinet and saxophone by mail.

Some schools used Edison’s phonographs for music work in other subjects. For example, in the October 1914 issue of the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, there was an entry entitled “How Edison Disc Music Impresses Children” that

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<sup>304</sup> Michael J. Galgano, J. Chris Arndt, and Raymond M. Hyser, *Doing History: Research and Writing in the Digital Age* (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 124.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

included information about an English teacher using music, as for instance “In a Gondola” by Mendelssohn, together with the Edison phonograph, to help inspire creativity and learning. The writer also revealed that the Edison phonograph was used outdoors as “... a means of entering into children’s songs and games....”<sup>306</sup>

A study of the ways in which non-music teachers employed Edison phonographs in their classes might uncover additional information on music education with the phonograph.

Coupling the aforementioned study with an investigation of the different Edison phonograph models utilized by schools could also prove valuable. An examination of the sales data at Thomas Edison National Historical Park as well as the figures from Edison phonograph dealers would be essential to determining which schools purchased and likely employed Edison’s products. J. Irwin Gerhart of Wernersville, Pennsylvania, for example, was a school teacher who taught singing in addition to apparently selling phonographs as an Edison dealer named Gerhart & Hassler. In the May 1907 issue of the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, Gerhart professed that he employed an Edison phonograph in a small rural school.<sup>307</sup>

An analysis of the contents of *The Etude* and *School Music Monthly* for stories concerning utilization of the phonograph and for phonograph-related advertisements could result in further insights. Independent publications such as

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<sup>306</sup> Thomas A. Edison, Inc., “How Edison Disc Music Impresses Children,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 7 (October 1914): 174, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>307</sup> National Phonograph Company, “As a Singing Teacher,” [circular], *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 5 (May 1907): 14, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Thomas Edison National Historical Park, photocopy in possession of the researcher, Nacogdoches, TX.

these two published information about current issues, some of it by respected educators such as those mentioned in *The Etude* symposium entitled “The Effect of Mechanical Instruments Upon Musical Education,” referenced in chapter 2 of the present document. Two educators who participated in the symposium, Rossiter W. Cole and Frederick W. Root, are mentioned in Birge’s *History of Public School Music in the United States*.<sup>308</sup> This type of inquiry could reveal additional music educators who taught with Edison’s products and advocated their use in formal and informal settings.

As mentioned in the “Literature Reviewed” section of the prologue, Birge noted that certain companies trained teachers to go into schools and other educational institutions to demonstrate how to utilize the phonograph in the teaching of music appreciation. The names of these companies, however, were not included. Therefore, an investigation into the ways in which this was accomplished and implemented by a business such as the Columbia Phonograph Company could yield valuable information and insights.

An examination of how the Edison phonograph was used in music education internationally is also in order. A partial replication of the design employed in the present study in another country such as France or England might uncover additional information. Edison, for example, travelled to the Paris Exposition in 1889, and a business named Edison Bell Phonographs was advertised in London as the “British Home of the Phonograph.”<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Rossiter W. Cole and Frederick W. Root are mentioned on page 239 and page 32, respectively; Birge, *History of Public School Music*.

<sup>309</sup> “Edison Bell Phonographs,” [cover].

The operation and output of the School Research Department of Thomas A. Edison, Inc. needs additional attention. More research needs to be conducted on the interactions and work of Walter V. Bingham, Esther L. Gatewood, and Charles H. Farnsworth. Lee indicated that "... the most significant aspect of Farnsworth's brief liaison with the company was the experimentation with students he and Gatewood did at Whittier Hall, Teachers College early in 1922 and at Farnsworth's girls' camps in Thetford that summer."<sup>310</sup> This type of testing may have resulted in material similar to the *Golden Treasury* book and the *Birthdays of Favorite Composers* booklet, which were released by the School Research Department of Thomas A. Edison Music Research.

An analysis of the musical works mentioned in the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. questionnaires would be highly informative. The musical tastes of Edison owners and the reasons provided for their choices could be assessed. An examination of the surviving responses from Thomas A. Edison, Inc. to Edison owners may provide additional insights into the company's operations.

### Conclusions

The contributions to music education of Thomas Alva Edison and his phonograph businesses were numerous but remain largely unreported. Although much has been written about Edison, to date there have been no significant studies addressing the ways in which he advanced music education. The standard storyline in music education history overwhelmingly spotlights the

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<sup>310</sup> Lee, "Education Through Music," 97.



work of Frances Elliott Clark and the Victor Talking Machine Company to the exclusion of Thomas A. Edison's contributions. This is probably because of Clark's importance to the leading music education organization of her time and today, and her other high-profile work, all of which elevated her to the top echelon of music educators with marquee value. The fascination to focus on these types of individuals led Jere Humphreys to bemoan that "Although time honored, 'top-down' historiography results in unbalanced accounts; the cumulative effects of this approach have resulted in inaccurate, inequitable views of the past."<sup>311</sup> Indeed, Clark was one of only 15 music educators who received 10 or more mentions in the Birge book, and one of only 10 in the Mark and Gary book, and the only woman in both cases.<sup>312</sup> There is therefore an incomplete and distorted history of the phonograph in the music education literature, as supported by the data introduced in the present document about Edison's connection to and interest in music instruction.

Edison's phonograph business was directly associated with the Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music, as evidenced by recordings housed at Thomas Edison National Historical Park. The recording feature of his phonograph was therefore an educational tool that helped enhance distance learning, as it allowed both teachers and students to record themselves—an impossibility on Victor's talking machines.

Both competitors offered prerecorded music to consumers, yet Edison owners could purchase blank media to record anything from office dictations to

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<sup>311</sup> Humphreys, "Sex and Geographic Representation," 68.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

music. Clear differences were therefore evident in the two approaches to music instruction promoted by Edison and Victor. While Clark's work with Victor is rightly and widely acknowledged in the music education literature, Edison's contributions to this field have been overlooked and remain so today, mainly the result of the "top-down" approach to historiography that has dominated the research agenda in music education history, as well as the major influence of the Birge book on subsequent music education historians. This study, therefore, detailed many of the ways in which Edison and his phonograph companies encouraged music education through student performance, self-recording, and correspondence instruction.

The present study provides the music education community more information about the musical techniques and methods used to educate people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the ways in which Edison contributed to their dissemination. Finally equipped with a study that chronicles the interactions of the inventor of the phonograph with music instruction, the music education community can now rightly acknowledge Thomas A. Edison's place in music education history.

What exactly is Edison's place in music education history? The answer is still being formulated. In 2013, it appears that Edison should be known as the father of the phonograph in music education, not only because he invented the device, but because he was a visionary for the phonograph in music education in both traditional and non-traditional settings. It is true that the music education community cannot claim him as its own in the sense that it has claimed, for

example, Frances Elliott Clark. We do not yet fully know how Edison fits into the elaborate and complex puzzle of music education history, in part because he was an “outsider” and thus has not received attention from music education historians. Whatever the case, it is clear that as an outsider, Edison was inside of the classroom influencing the study of music via his phonograph before the Victor Talking Machine Company was founded. That being said, Victor has received the vast majority of attention in music education because the company was more successful at marketing its products for music education purposes. Maybe the outcome would have been different if Thomas Edison had devoted his undivided attention to the phonograph. Nonetheless, more in depth descriptions of Edison’s contributions to music education will depend upon further inquiry. The exploratory nature of this dissertation is but one small step in the process of defining the place of Thomas Alva Edison in music education history.

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- . "New Use For Phonograph." *The New Phonogram* [booklet], [n.v.] (October 1911): 15. The Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, Phonograph, Record Bulletins–Catalogs, Box 1 of 3, NAFME Historical Center.
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### Miscellaneous

- Elliker, Calvin. "Early Imprints In The Thomas A. Edison Collection Of American Sheet Music: Addenda to Sonneck-Upton and to Wolfe, 2000: i-ii." See also: Early Imprints in the Thomas A. Edison Collection of American Sheet Music: Addenda to Sonneck-Upton and to Wolfe. *Notes*, Second Series, 57 (Music Library Association, Mar., 2001): 555-73.
- Siegel-Myers Correspondence School of Music. [Advertisement]. *The Etude* 31 (March 1913): 231.

## VITA

**Kevin Daniel Kelleher**

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 Nacogdoches, TX 75962  
 Year of Birth: 1975  
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**Education**

**Doctor of Musical Arts–Music Education (D.M.A.)**, Boston University, Boston, MA

May 2013

**Master of Music Education (M.M.E.)**, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA  
 December 2005, Summa Cum Laude

**Bachelor of Music–Music Education**, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA  
 May 2005, Magna Cum Laude

**Bachelor of Music–Music Composition**, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA  
 May 2004, Magna Cum Laude

**Teaching Experience**

<u>Stephen F. Austin State University–Nacogdoches, TX</u>	June 2009–Present
School of Music, Instructor, Full-time Faculty	
Sound Recording Technology Program Director	

## Primary Responsibilities:

- Teach sound recording technology courses to undergraduate music majors.
- Develop curriculum to obtain plan approval for the Bachelor of Music: Emphasis in Sound Recording Technology degree from the National Association of Schools of Music.
- Run the Pro Tools Certified Training Location as part of the AVID Learning Partner program.
- Advise students.
- Supervise student internships and oversee final recording projects.
- Arrange guest artists.
- Develop online courses and supervise the teacher of the online courses.
- Oversee concert recordings for the School of Music and supervise the recording crew.
- Manage the sound recording technology budget.

- Acquire and facilitate scholarships for sound recording technology majors: Encore Recording Studio & Texas Blueberry Festival.
- Chair the Technology Committee in the School of Music.

Old Dominion University–Norfolk, VA  
Department of Music, Adjunct Faculty

January 2006–May 2009

Primary Responsibilities:

- Teach recording and music production courses to undergraduate students.
- Recommend equipment and install Pro Tools workstations.
- Create Pro Tools courses and design a curriculum for a live audio class.
- Revise and implement music theory curricula.
- Teach other courses such as Basic Musicianship as needed by the department.

Visual and Performing Arts Academy

Percussion Ensemble Director–September 2005–April 2006  
Salem High School–Virginia Beach, VA

Cox High School

Pit Percussion Instructor–August–October 2005  
Virginia Beach, VA

Mars Music

Private Percussion Instructor–August–December 2002  
Virginia Beach, VA

Lakewood Music Academy

Classroom Percussion Instructor–December 2000–March 2001  
Norfolk, VA

Community Music Academy

Private Percussion Instructor–December 1995  
Norfolk, VA

### **Convention & Symposium Presentations**

Audio Engineering Society

129<sup>th</sup> Convention, San Francisco, CA–November 2010

Chattanooga Symposium on the History of Music Education

Chattanooga, TN–June 2011

### Certifications & Licensure

**AVID Instructor Certification Program**, May 2011

- Certified Pro Tools HD 8 Expert | Music

**Online Certified Instructor**, December 2010

- Stephen F. Austin State University

**AVID Certified Instructor**, July 2010

**Future Rhythm**, 2008, Santa Clara, CA

- Certified Pro Tools HD 7 Operator | Post

**Virginia Collegiate Professional License**, May 2005

- Teaching Certification–Music: Instrumental PreK-12

### Recordings

Domino

*The Transition* (forthcoming)

Recording & Mixing Engineer (2011)

Stephen F. Austin State University Lumberjack Marching Band

*2009-2010 Sounds from the Stadium*

Ace Winn

*3127*, 2010

Christafari

*Word, Sound & Power*, 1999-#9 on Billboard's Top Reggae Albums Chart

National & International Touring, Television and Radio

Kevin Kelleher & Friends

*Reflections of the Sun*, 1999

### Movie

*Christmas With The Dead* (2012)

Supervising Sound Designer

Torino Film Festival, 2012

### Select Ensemble Experience

**Christafari**

July 1997–May 2000

Drummer / Percussionist / Songwriter in a Billboard charting, internationally-recognized touring and recording reggae band.

**The Tidewater Winds**

July 2005–August 2008

Percussionist in a professional concert band in the Sousa band tradition

**Creo**

August 2004–April 2006

Percussionist in a new-music ensemble specializing in contemporary chamber music.

**Scholarships, Grants & Honors**

Charles E. & Frieda O. Vogan Music Scholarship–Composition

Ludwig F. Diehn Music Scholarship–Performance

Old Dominion University Honors College-Research Grant-Composition  
Culminated in an Oral Presentation at the 2004 CAA Undergraduate Research  
Conference at the Trabant University Center–University of Delaware

National Dean's List