

Such nuances of distinction drive much of Reiner's argument. It is not that his argument is unconvincing, it is simply that the domain in which the reasoning takes place is so abstruse as sometimes to irritate.

'Anyone who is concerned with the complex interrelationship among music, meaning, and temporality must read this book,' says a testimonial from Jonathan D Kramer on the back cover. It may be an endurance test, requiring an extremely close reading of all two hundred-odd pages to fully grasp his argument, but that is the inevitable nature of so thorough an investigation, and as an object-lesson in closely argued logic it could not be bettered.

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Ross Laird, *Sound Beginnings: The Early Record Industry in Australia*

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We are beginning to realise the richness of the surviving archives of the record industry for the history of music in the twentieth century. The publication of Peter Martland's sumptuously produced, illustrated history of EMI,¹ and in a similar format, Anthony Pollard's wide-ranging and gorgeously illustrated history of the first seventy-five years of *Gramophone* magazine,² have alerted us to previously unexplored archives relating to the record industry, and to the fact that, in some cases, the key players are still alive. Pollard's history of *Gramophone* magazine, for example, is doubly important now that the Pollard family has relinquished control of the magazine after three-quarters of a century. These are major additions to the literature of the history of sound recording; they will doubtless lead on to further, more academic, studies. From the point of view of the present review, the most interesting fact is that neither of them mentions Australia, other than as the birthplace of Dawson and Melba. Now, Ross Laird, drawing on material surviving in Australia and London, has demonstrated what a rich vein record company history is for the economic and cultural history of music in Australia.

The hundred-year world history of the recording industry relates a series of short-term financial successes, driven by technical innovation, and ended by further change or economic or political events. Possibly the key change that allowed the industry to grow, and recordings to be taken seriously by leading performers, was the development of electrical recording, introduced in 1925. This account of the early Australian record industry from 1924 to 1934 starts from that first great technical development, and encompasses the crash of 1929. In the words of the blurb for Ross Laird's book, it was a tumultuous decade 'which moved from prosperity to bankruptcy with dizzy speed.' In his introduction, Laird describes the years 1924 to 1934 as 'without question the most significant decade in the history of the Australian record industry; seventy years later the events of those years are still echoing in our musical culture' (p.xi).

¹ Peter Martland, *Since Records Began: EMI, The First 100 years* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1997).

² Anthony Pollard, *Gramophone: The First 75 years* (Harrow: Gramophone Publications Ltd, 1998).

World wide, the early success of the record industry before the First World War saw the principal player, the Gramophone Company, from an Anglo-German manufacturing base setting up subsidiaries around the world, and transporting mobile recording equipment internationally, particularly to Russia, India and the Far East. The First World War saw the end of this phase. At first, like much of the music industry, it must have been possible to think that in August 1914 the Gramophone Company suddenly faced total disaster. But a combination of patriotic material, of which in the UK 'Tipperary' became the greatest hit up to that date, and the use of its manufacturing capacity to produce munitions, carried the Company through.

The wide popularity of wartime recordings, including those of orchestral material, and the arrival of the 'jazz age,' led on to a renewed boom after the war and a remarkable expansion of the record catalogue. This included extensive orchestral recordings, the extent of whose repertoire has only become apparent with the publication of Claude Gravelly Arnold's pioneering catalogue *The Orchestra on Record, 1896-1926*.³ This phase only lasted four or five years, and the introduction of electrical recording in 1925 led to the complete re-recording of existing repertoires and the expansion of the recorded classical repertoire.

The first manufacturing capability in Australia was for acoustic records, but the almost immediate upgrade to electrical recording only affected the recording side of the business. Processing and pressing plants for acoustic records were no different to those for electrical recordings, and, as in the rest of the world, electrical recording quickly followed, on the technical coat-tails of the rapidly burgeoning broadcasting companies.

Laird gives us essentially a documentary history, presenting his subject in its period in unprecedented detail, drawing fully on a wide variety of business and government papers and press cuttings to document his subject for the first time. Laird reproduces documents at length, but without extensive analysis: this is thus a source-book as well as history.

In the introduction to his study Laird remarks:

The Australian record industry itself seems amazingly ignorant of its own origins. In *Profile of the Australian Record Industry* produced only a few years ago by ARIA (Australian Record Industry Association), the pre-1950s history of the Australian record industry rates three lines. The next paragraph begins: 'Prior to the 1950s there was little recording activity of Australian compositions or performers...'. In fact, over 5000 commercially issued recordings had been made in Australia by 1950, and this does not include an even larger number of recordings made for private use, for radio broadcast, or for other specialist purposes (p.xiv).

Laird also discusses what he calls 'the prehistory,' in a fascinating introductory chapter. He shows that the first cylinder phonograph reached Australia in 1879, little over a year after the granting of Edison's patent. But Edison's first tin-foil phonograph was crude; soon refined and improved, the cylinder phonograph seems to have had a wide use in Australia, extending well into the twentieth century.

Flat disc recordings were first made in Europe at the turn of the century; the first, most primitive discs were produced in London in 1898. In the period before 1907, a large part of the

³ Claude Gravelly Arnold, *The Orchestra on Record, 1896-1926—An Encyclopedia of Orchestral Recordings Made by the Acoustical Process*, Discographies, No.73 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997).

Australian record market seems to have been dependent upon high quality cylinders, apparently as a result of dumping. Laird tells us that cylinders continued to be available as fully imported products until 1929, but the disc format became more and more dominant from the early 1900s on. A series of Edison cylinders of American artists performing Australian compositions, made specifically for the Australian market, was first released in 1917, but was short-lived. Laird does not say, but I wondered constantly while reading his fascinating history to what extent some of these early examples actually survive—to my knowledge, there has never been an historical survey on CD of the earliest Australian recordings.

The fact remains that from the 1890s Australia was producing a remarkable number of international performing artists, not least Ada Crossley, Nellie Melba, Peter Dawson, Percy Grainger, George Thalben-Ball and Harold Williams, all of whom made their careers and their recordings in the UK or the USA. Major names visited Australia regularly on performing tours, but did not record locally for the local market, much less for export. This was an issue long before there was the capability, much less the will-power and the organisation, to do so. Laird (p.22) quotes *The Star* in 1909: 'Why are there no Australian made records of importance? Is a question to which there is no satisfactory answer... The land of the beautiful voices with the "velvet" tone should be the home of specially beautiful records.'

The first disc records were manufactured in Australia in the 1920s. Before this, material intended for the Australian market was recorded abroad and imported. In 1910, the Homophone company in Berlin produced several labels especially for export to Australia, made for specific retail outlets. However, British preferential tariffs allowed lower duties—or none at all—on British-manufactured goods imported into Australia, and so Australian music was recorded in the UK for release in Australia on import labels, the titles often not being available in Britain.

Inevitably, any history of the recording industry between the wars has to face the issue of the popular music of the day, and the debate between a hide-bound musical establishment and the demands of the market. The early history of the Australian record industry is a history of popular music. Laird covers this in his chapter 'The Distressing Effects of Syncopation.' He finds that by the 1920s 'the gramophone was generally considered an essential item in any home,' and just before the arrival of electrical recording there were about a million in use in Australia. Laird prints a good variety of press coverage documenting the debate as to what constituted 'good music.' In this climate, Australian composers of ballads and popular vocal numbers seemed to have been the only ones to benefit from the growth of the gramophone. A typical example was the Melbourne composer May Brahe, who moved to England in 1912 in her late 20s, only returning to Australia in 1939. As the composer of a huge number of popular songs, her discography lists some 270 performances of fifty-one compositions,⁴ making her 'undoubtedly the most successful Australian song-writer of her generation' (p.25).⁵

The arrival of the radio was seen, initially, in some quarters—as it was elsewhere in the world—as offering a serious challenge to the record industry. In the end, they formed a practical symbiotic relationship. This whole area raises so many questions of cultural identity, both for

⁴ Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuel, *The New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (London: Macmillan, 1994) 82.

⁵ Laird 25, citing Kay Dreyfus, 'Biography of May Brahe,' *Australian Record & Music Review* 15 (Oct. 1992): 12.

the development of popular culture and the marketing of serious composition in Australia. Certainly the latter was done most effectively by the ABC after its formation in 1932,⁶ rather than by the recording industry or local musical entrepreneurs.

The establishment of mainstream production recording facilities was preceded by a variety of ingenious, but ultimately unsuccessful, individual technical entrepreneurs. One of these, Stuart Booty, seems to have been behind the first reported Australian instance of an 'off-air' recording being made of a broadcast, for replay at a Radio Exhibition in Sydney in 1927. This is very early, and one wonders whether it might have been a world first.

Laird documents the activities of the major companies in the 1920s—Brunswick, HMV, Columbia, Parlophone, Vocalion and the role of the 1927 Tariff Board Enquiry. So many far-seeing pioneering technical activities in Australia, which in another place and another time might well have had major importance, came to naught. The search for the long-playing record and the flexible record were but two examples. The effect of raised tariffs on imported records, and the bankruptcy of Australian manufacturers, meant that in a very short time EMI had a virtual monopoly of the Australian market, and 'the lack of competition from imported records was to be an overriding feature of the Australian record market from 1928 until legislation was finally passed in 1998 to allow for parallel import of compact discs' (p.275).

This is essentially a history of business, regulation, technological development and cultural movements. It is not a cultural or musical history, in that Laird does not discuss individual works or composers. While it documents the remarkable burgeoning of Australian domestic production, it does not consider the actual music as music, nor does it consider the recording of concert music or music by Australian composers.

To a non-Australian reviewer, what is glaringly absent from Laird's history is the serious Australian composer—doubtless because in the 1920s it was not an issue. Indeed, in Peter Tregear's account of Fritz Hart's musical activities in Melbourne in the 1920s, the word recording is never mentioned.⁷ When was the first serious Australian composition recorded in Australia? It has been suggested that it was Frank Hutchens's *Fantasy Concerto*, recorded in 1944.⁸ Certainly Volume 23 of the *Anthology of Australian Music on Disc* consisted of reissues of music by Alfred Hill, Margaret Sutherland and Edgar Bainton, first recorded on 78s,⁹ but these were recordings made between 1945 and 1952. Australian music seemed to come of age with Goossens's recording of John Antill's *Corroboree* with the ABC's Sydney Symphony Orchestra on four 78rpm sides, on 5 December 1950.¹⁰ Here we had a striking Australian orchestral work, recorded and manufactured in Australia, given international prominence through the medium of recording.

Laird concludes with an annotated list of record labels available in Australia before 1934, which is valuable as a list of the record companies of the time in its own right. There is only

⁶ See K.S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission 1932-1983* (Melbourne: MUP, 1983).

⁷ Peter Tregear, *Fritz Bernicke Hart: An Introduction to his Life and Music*, MMus thesis, University of Melbourne, 1993.

⁸ [Australian] Columbia LOX 549/51. Released on four double-sided 78s with Lindley Evans's *Idyll*. See Lindley Evans, 'Hello, Mr Melody Man': *Lindley Evans Remembers* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1983) 108.

⁹ *Chamber Music Made and Played in Australia 1945-1952*, *Anthology of Australian Music on Disc*, CD CSM 23 (Canberra: Canberra School of Arts, Australian National University, 1996).

¹⁰ [Australian] HMV ED 1193/4.

one downside: the splendid selection of documents and photographs is compromised by the poor quality of reproduction, showing all too clear evidence of crude digital processing.

Laird opens our eyes to a major lever on cultural development over many years. His book will doubtless lead to others, but he leaves me with a significant frustration which readers will surely share—not being able readily to hear any of the early recordings.

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