

THREE YEARS' RECORDING TRIP IN EUROPE AND ASIA

Many Interesting Incidents and Impressions Set Forth in Greatest Recording Expedition Ever Made – Oriental Artists Hitherto Unknown Introduced to People of the World.

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After recording in India I returned to Paris where I recorded a number of French artists before proceeding to London to enjoy a short vacation. My next jaunt was to Berlin where after a stay recording I left for Moscow and Russia to record all through the winter season.

The French and German artists are already too well known to need any superfluous comment which I may add. There was, however, a surprising absence of really good (that is from a recording standpoint) military (German) bands. The bands are invariably excellent in the playing of the famous German marches and folk songs, but fail singularly in the execution of works by famous composers. Even in the marches there is a predominance of the peck horns which is incomprehensible to the admirers of balance in music. There is a lamentable absence of that piquant, scintillating tempo which one enjoys so much with the French bands.

The French bands, on the other hand, lack the depth and strength of the Coldstream Guards and Sousa's band. I think, however, there is not the least doubt that the Russian military bands are the worst in Europe, and the best the British.

In France and Germany the artists are all interested in recording for the talking machine, but from two widely opposite standpoints; the majority are interested from the monetary, the minority from the reputation point of view.

In both countries there is a deplorable absence of really good choirs as in Russia (always bearing in mind I am speaking from the talking machine view).

In Russia it is the majority that sing with criticism and enthusiasm for the talker for their reputation's sake, and but a small minority for the monetary consideration alone.

In the following lines I shall endeavor to outline where I found the most interest in the three years peregrinating I had just finished, with, with a short criticism of artists from a talking machine man's view. To criticise and definitely state in

which country are the best artists and singers is an undertaking so contradictory and argumentative-beset with the conflicting diversities in idiom, teaching, taste and color, that it would be irrelevant to attempt. I might say that "*Russia possesses the finest voices in Europe*" and the reason for such a pragmatical statement may be just that which another critic considers the most objectionable and derogatory in a voice. As an example, "*temperament*." Temperament in England is looked upon as affectation and is accordingly disliked. Whereas temperament and affectation are as widely opposite as naturalness and ostentation.

I might further say "*In Russia everyone sings.*"

I shall certainly meet the rejoinder "*The same in Italy.*"

In Italy, however, the people sing and whistle in the same manner that the people of England and America sing and whistle a popular song or ragtime massacre of music, with the exception that the average Italian possesses better taste and whistles operatic airs with as much ease as his English-speaking brothers whistle "*Everybody's Doing It.*"

In Russia the peasants will sing who have never been outside the precincts of their miserable little wooden villages. I remember hearing a little Italian boy whistling "*Quista O Quella*" in Venice, but then I also recall hearing two peasants away out in Western Siberia singing songs which one of them had composed. There are sure to be thousands of people who have heard similar things in France, Germany and other countries, so I therefore shall not attempt to classify in their respective order what I consider the "*follow my leader of artistic ability and competence,*" but shall simply state that in my experience and handling phonographically 12,000 persons, the Russian artists certainly and irrefragably make the best records, both from the technical and artistic standpoint.

I found the Russian people the most musical, that is, naturally musical without teaching, or hearing of others.

The average Russians of the more or less educated class are invariably cognizant with the works of all the famous composers. They will play or talk to you of Italian, Polish, Russian, German, Norwegian and other composers. What is more, they learn something of the life of each of the composers and in this way are able, according to their own heart, to put the emphasis or idiom into each respective composer in a manner which will amaze the average English-speaking man.

The average European or American, it must be confessed, will play certain pieces of famous composers, but will they be able to tell you anything of the life of even their favorite; I refer to the average amateur not the tutored genius or pseudo-genius. This love of music is one of the principal reasons for the enormous business being done in talking machines at present in Russia and which, furthermore, is growing daily.

Of the English, French, Polish, Italian, Spanish and other languages and artists I found the easiest to record the Italian, after which the French and Spanish, and

lastly, the people from the Baltic provinces, the Asenish and Littoish. Their records are to be likened to a series of chokings and gaspings for breath. No, I found but one country whose artists are worthy of comment over and above those of other nationalities, and that is the Russians.

To return to my tour. On my return to Moscow I found time to calculate my tour and the number of languages and countries I had traveled through for the talker [= *talking machine*]. The three years' tour had taken me through the following countries: England, Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Finland, Russia (all parts), Bohemia, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Caucasus, Turkestan, Persia, Chinese Turkestan and India. A distance, including all peregrinations of 46,000 miles, over-land only.

Recorded the following nationalities of artists:

Aderbideshanski [= Azerbaijani?], Afghan, American, Armenian, Arabian, Asenish, Austrian, Awar, British (including all the colonies), Belgium, Bengalee, Bohemian, Bokharian, Bulgarian, Gabardinski, Canarese, Chucus, Czart, Dervish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Grusinian, Gooriski, Hindustani, Ingoushie, Italian, Kaldinski, Kivents, Koomiki, Koordinski [= *Kurdish?*], Lesgin, Lettoish, Mahratta, Ossettine [= *Ossetian*], Polish, Persian, Persian Tartar, Russian, Little Russian, Swedish, Spanish, Svanetz, Sanscrit, Turkish, Turkoman, Tekints, Tchichence [= *Chechens*], Tamul [= *Tamil*], Telegu, Yiddish.

In all, approximately fifty-three distinct languages, with perhaps four exceptions, such as English and American, but in that case I am counting the artist.

Before speaking of the financial side and artists' fees in Europe I will relate one or two exciting experiences which I encountered together with the cost of my first tour to Turkestan and Caucasus.

The artists of the Caucasus are drawn from the mountain tribes who are scattered about in a most perplexing chaos to those unaccustomed to climbing mountains in search of them, for this is what I was compelled to do to obtain any artists.

I was forced to ride a horse for many hours, traversing difficult winding paths and suffering all kinds of (for a recorder) hardships.

It was on one of these trips (I did four in all) that I met with my first adventure. I had just finished choosing eight men from several groups of Ingoushie people, and had commenced my return and downward journey of six hours. (It had taken eight hours to climb. I had left Vladikavkaz at six in the morning and should have returned there at ten the same night). This was a particularly hazardous experience and best with the possibilities of a hold-up. I had been informed of that danger and had hidden my money, together with revolver, under my saddle. (In the sweltering heat of the Caucasus in June even a revolver is heavy). I was accompanied by an interpreter. After having been but an hour on our journey we were actually held up by a party of Tchichence [= *Chechens*] who robbed us.

Finding practically no money upon me, they became incensed and seemed to doubt whether I should be thrown over the precipice, 3,000 feet below, or captured and ransom demanded. They fortunately drew away to confer, out of the hearing of the interpreter, and I seized the chance of securing my gun and, firing into the midst of them, (being a rotten shot, nothing happened) mounted my horse with the intention of riding past them, but they had already retreated and at this moment my hands were full with my horse which had commenced prancing [= *prancing*] in a most ominous manner and was backing slowly towards the edge of the precipice. I did my best to pull her round but without success, and I was just in time to throw myself off as she went hurling over to positive destruction 3,000 feet below. I had lost a horse, 2,000 roubles in money, and my date book. On looking around for our friend the enemy, they had evaporated, so also had the interpreter. I slept that night in the mountains and continued my journey in the morning. After five hours' camping I was feeling very fatigued and fortunately met a horseman who, by signs, I made understand that I wanted a little food. He gave me a little Armenian bread and a few herbs, which was my first food for twenty-four hours. After another hour's tramp I met a posse of Cossacks accompanied by my interpreter, who, when he saw me, commenced weeping with joy, for he told me that when the horse fell over he believed I had also gone. He was now returning with the Cossacks to punish the Tchichence [= *Chechens*]. (Which they did by soldering all knives into their sheaths, and confiscating all fire arms, and demanding 500 roubles for damages).

Two days later I received back my 2,000 roubles which a police search party had found.

In after visits I was always accompanied by two Cossack guards.

In the Caucasus mountains the talker can be heard in every one of the multitudinous villages; the records are played unceasingly and are therefore soon worn out, causing a result which is not particularly pleasing to other than the Cossacks themselves who will never buy another record of the same title until one is actually broken. Even then they retain the pieces and in some cases decorate their huts with them. There is a fair amount of business done in the Caucasus; there is a population of seven millions, excluding three million Russian people. The talking machine is the only means of amusement and therefore is in demand. My next little adventure on this tour was across the Caspian sea. My machine in this case was for recording on very large cylinders. (The cylinders are afterwards duplicated onto the wax disc and manufactured in the usual way).

At Baku all my personal luggage was scrutinized and permission and photograph demanded for carrying a gun. On board the vessel was a company of Russian soldiers with fixed bayonets (there were only nine passengers, four army men, two Russian merchants, a German, myself and interpreter) which made the passengers (other than were not Russian officers) feel anxious. It appeared that there had

been a considerable amount of ammunition taken into Turkestan by way of the Caspian Sea from Baku, but why on earth they deemed it necessary for the men to fix bayonets is still an enigma to me. Just outside the miserable mud town of Krasnovodsk, the custom and police officials came aboard to examine all heavy luggage. All went well until, until I endeavored to explain the recording machine to avoid the necessity of opening it. I merely succeeded in aggravating their (already obvious) suspicion of my explanation of the “cylinder” and they ordered me to open the cases immediately. When I had opened two, the framework and the motor, I was getting rather warm and told them I must go downstairs to have a drink before I opened the machine case containing the mandrel – a large cylindrical steel tube six inches in diameter and fourteen inches long. They refused, but I insisted, and I was accompanied down to the saloon by an officer and two soldiers. That was the funniest drink I ever had in my life. When I put my hand to my pocket for money they imagined I sought my gun and I found myself very nearly being ripped with bayonets. Then I received my drink and wishing the officer “good health,” drank a little and lighted a cigar. By this time the other officer was evidently getting anxious and came down to see if I was quite safe. I then returned to the deck and opened the case containing the mandrel. When the police and army men saw it, they involuntarily recoiled as though it was actually an infernal machine. Seeing the amused expression on my countenance they regained their Russian surliness and commenced to look very gingerly at the machine. Not any of those men had the least knowledge of a recording machine or what it might appear in shape, and I was placed under temporary arrest until the Governor of the town arrived.

By this time I and my interpreter were almost in hysterics with the manner in which these Russians were being fooled.

No one was allowed to land and it was three hours before the Governor arrived. He was an intelligent man and spoke English. He ignored all the invidious suspicions of his officers (possibly he had seen my facetious countenance) and approached me and politely asked me in English: “*Will you please explain what machine you have here.*” I explained accordingly and he immediately understood, and with an apology for detaining me, said: “*We have been experiencing considerable trouble with gun-runners and have been hoodwinked at every point; my men are therefore inclined to be incredulous of explanations of almost any type of machinery.*”

I was invited to lunch with him, which I gladly accepted for I afterwards discovered that in Krasnovodsk there is no hotel restaurant or any other place where one is able to obtain food, other than the station buffet where it was possible to secure hot beer, old apples and stale ham.

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