

# FAVORITE PIONEER RECORDING ARTISTS

By JIM WALSH

## FRED VAN EPS

(NOTE—It is a pleasure to dedicate this series of articles to a gifted young banjoist and painter who is probably Fred Van Eps' most ardent admirer—Howard Weilmuenster of Ballwin, Missouri, his wife, Alma, and their baby son, David Michael, born November 7, 1955. Howard says David "will be ONE boy, in his generation) who will know who Fred Van Eps is!") J.W.

### I. Introduction

January, 1956, marks the fourteenth anniversary of my beginning to write for HOBBIES. And never, since my first article appeared under the short-lived heading of "The Coney Island Crowd," have I felt more pride in telling the life story of any singer or musician than I now have in presenting this "profile" of the man conceded by virtually every authority to be the greatest living master of the five-string banjo.

There are several reasons why I am proud of this series. For one, I consider Fred Van Eps not only the greatest contemporary banjoist, but also the most important pioneer recording artist whose life story has not yet been told by me. It is a story for which I have had dozens of requests over the years.

For another, Mr. Van Eps is the first celebrity who has made a special trip to my home to be interviewed for a HOBBIES biographical sketch. After attending a banjoists' convention in Lewisburg, Pa., Fred drove to Roanoke, arriving Monday, September 19th, 1955, and spent the greater part of two days with me. He brought with him an Edison cylinder phonograph which he had equipped with an electric motor and pick-up, on which he had played banjo records for the enthusiasts at Lewisburg. The day before he left to return home to New Jersey, I sat him down in front of a tape recorder and, by asking innumerable leading questions, elicited, in effect, the spoken story of his life. That same day I had him talk by long distance with two of his enthusiastic admirers—A. R. Via, Jr., and N. G. Terry, Jr., well known South Boston, Va., record collectors. I recall Fred's humorous greeting to "Jack" Via was: "Good afternoon, Mr. Via. This is Fred Van Eps. I play banjo. What crimes do you commit?"

There was nothing egotistical or vainglorious in Fred Van Eps' attitude as he recalled the lights and shadows of his 76 years. Instead, he quietly, modestly and patiently answered questions as I asked them. Because of having used the record-

ing device, I shall, for the first time, be able to tell the greater part of an artists' life story in his own words.

I shall do this by setting the tape in motion and transcribing Fred's statements. Naturally, some editing will be necessary. I shall not include the questions I asked which brought out the transcribed information. For the sake of greater clarity and structural coherence, I shall not always publish his remarks in the order in which they turn up on the tape, but shall rearrange them in order to provide a more connected narrative. Some of the reminiscences I shall include have no direct bearing on Fred Van Eps' life story, but in my judgment should be included because they possess musical and historical value as a revelation of his unusual experiences, colorful personality and individual mental patterns.

Too, I shall take the liberty of continuing to write in the first person when I include something my dear friend told me when we were casually conversing but not speaking into the Recorder. Letters and material which he thoughtfully prepared for me will be treated in like manner. After his reminiscences have been concluded, I shall round out the series with a review of the distinguished banjoist's recording achievements.

I offered to submit the manuscript to Mr. Van Eps for his approval, but he said that wasn't necessary, for he was sure anything I wrote would be fair-minded and accurate. I shall do my best to live up to his estimate. You may be sure I shall not tamper with the statements contained on the tape and that, in quoting from unaided memory, I shall use great care not to distort anything he said or misrepresent him in any way. I consider myself extremely fortunate that, because of Mr. Van Eps' gracious cooperation, I have an unusually interesting collection of photographs from which to choose in illustrating his memoirs. One thing I regret keenly is that Fred's beloved wife, Florence, who had been his devoted companion for 43 years, did not live to see this HOBBIES tribute.

For the sake of simplicity, I shall refrain from placing the printed matter that follows in quotation marks. But I think you will understand that, from now on, until I speak again in my own right, the "I" with whom you are about to become acquainted is Fred Van Eps and not Jim Walsh.

### II. Fred Van Eps' Own Story

My name is Fred—not Frederick—Van Eps, but the birth certificate which was issued when I was born in Somerville, N. J., on December 30, 1878, doesn't list any given name. I am identified merely as a "male". When my wife and I decided to visit Europe in the spring of 1954 I had trouble getting a passport until I produced a program which mentioned a violin performance I gave when I was a small boy.

Somerville is exactly half way between Jersey City and Easton. My father, John Perry Van Eps, was a watchmaker. On my father's side I am descended from some of the old Dutch settlers of New York State. The family came originally from the Mohawk Valley near Herkimer, and one of my ancestors, who was also a John P., outfitted and commanded a company in the Revolutionary War. So you see there have been Van Epses around for some time—and, judging by the way the grandchildren are coming along, they'll be around for quite a while yet! My parents had one other child—my brother William, five years younger than I, who now lives in Arizona.

My mother's maiden name was Jenny A. Bergen. It seems that in the 1600's a man named Hansen came over from Bergen, Norway, and changed his name to Bergen. Whether there's any connection with Bergen county, New Jersey, is something I don't know. Anyway, I'm Dutch on one side and Scandinavian on the other—probably with a sprinkling of other nationalities. My father and mother died in 1926, within 12 days of each other. He was 81. She was 77. That's the way devoted married couples ought to go—within a few days of each other. Then neither is left behind long to grieve for the other.

I grew up and got most of my schooling in Somerville. Then we moved to Plainfield, which is still my mail address, although I live in Warrenville, on a Plainfield RFD, high up in the Jersey mountains. I was 13 when we went to Plainfield in 1892, but I was still in Somerville when I began studying the violin at the age of seven. That violin study was very much my father's idea instead of my own. A few years later, when I wanted to give up the violin for the banjo, he didn't like the idea and wouldn't buy me an instrument. Finally my mother broke down and bought me one.

Maybe you wonder how it happened I decided I wanted to play a banjo. Well, I just happened to hear one and liked it much better than the violin. I still like it better after all these years. The banjo is a peculiar instrument. It's almost the easiest if you want to get certain effects, but the hardest of all if you set out to master its maximum possibilities. It's harder than the violin because when you draw the bow on a violin you have control of the tone from start to finish, but when you hit out with your right hand on your banjo if you don't hit right there's nothing you can do about it—it's gone.

And there's always room for a ban-

joist to improve his technique. After playing in one way for around 40 years I worked out a new technique in the 1930's. It seems that before then no one had ever taken stock of the banjoist's working tools and tried to find out what the hands could and could not do. My investigation showed that of the three basic motions of the right hand, two were unnatural and awkward, therefore tiresome, and contrary to the design of the hand. What I did was to retain the one good move and use in place of the awkward two a highly natural move—thumb, first finger, second finger, in rotation, in this order. That is the natural sweep of the hand and is very fast, bringing the banjo up to violin or flute velocity. I can now play 14 notes per second.

This is what makes it possible to play rapid numbers such as "William Tell Finale," "Chopin's "Minute Waltz," "Dizzy Fingers," etc. That reminds me that the "William Tell Finale" has been the joke of the banjo for as long as I can remember. All the vaudeville players used it—but the violins in the orchestra did the work. My changed technique has made it possible for the banjoist to play it in proper tempo.

I don't remember just how many years I played the violin. I do remember I used to play at school exercises on Friday mornings. I was a bad boy on the repeats. The girl who played the piano was always prepared to hop over if I skipped them. I'd like to have a record of that scratch. I'll bet it was something awful!

I was 12 when the banjo began to fascinate me. I heard a conductor on the Jersey Central Railroad, George W. Jenkins, play and it sounded so musical I knew I wanted to play a banjo, too. Although Jenkins didn't read music he was a very musical man, and my mother engaged him to teach me. He taught parrot fashion—played it over and over and showed me where to put my fingers. It didn't take long to learn all his numbers, and I was at a dead end until I heard a record by Vess L. Ossman, who was called "The Banjo King." Then I began to run around, looking for more music and to take a greater interest in my playing.

#### IV. Fred's First Banjo Record and Phonograph

The first Ossman record I ever heard was "The White Star Line March." I had been trying to play that myself by ear. I decided I had to have a phonograph to listen to the records by Ossman and other banjoists—and right now I'd like to say that at his best Vess Ossman was a wonderfully fine player. His work deteriorated in his later years—largely, I suppose, because he didn't keep practicing consistently—but I have been listening lately to some of his very old records and many of them are amazingly good. Ossman had a certain rhythmic facility that I don't think any other banjoist has ever equaled.

"The White Star Line" wasn't an Edison record. I heard it in 1893 be-

fore Edison began to make cylinders. It was a New Jersey Record made by the old United States Phonograph Company at 87-91 Orange Street, Newark. The U. S. Company was upstairs above Swift's meat house. They had the hams and carcasses downstairs and the records upstairs. Of course some "hams" went upstairs occasionally to make records! The first time I visited the studio I heard a band playing so loud and clear I thought surely the musicians themselves must be up there, but it was just a record!

"So I bought a Type M Edison two-minute cylinder phonograph. It cost me \$100—a lot of money then—but I paid for it the next week by attaching 14 ear tubes, taking it to the Firemen's Fair and letting people listen at five cents a play. I've got those tubes yet that fit in your ears. Lots of people came up who had never heard a phonograph before. Mine was the first in Plainfield, which even then was quite a decent sized city. To tell the truth, the machine was something of a nuisance because it was so much of a curiosity. People would come to my home and ask to be allowed to listen to it. We couldn't very well refuse them, but all such favors took time.

"Well, anyway, I bought all the Ossman records, and soon I was able to play them and write out the copies. My chief purpose in getting the machine was to practice making my own records, and I began to do home recordings almost as soon as I obtained it. Incidentally, I still have some of the wax cylinder recordings I made more than 60 years ago and they are in as good condition as the day I made them. I have preserved them by protecting them from moisture and extremes of heat or cold. Dampness and temperature extremes will cause a fungus to form on the surface and spoil the records. Mine have always had the best care. I imagine I am the only artist with records made by himself three score years ago.

I got my blanks from the U. S. people—20 cents each. All the machines in those days had a shaving attachment. If you didn't like the results you simply shaved them off and tried again. Plainfield is 17 miles from Newark. It would have been quite a trip by horse and buggy, but there were direct train connections. Victor and Clyde Emerson were with U. S. then. I don't remember whether Harvey Emmons was there at that time or not. He was later. Still later he went with Edison and, among other things, made chimes records under the name of Henry Nesbit. Frank Capps, who had such a long career in various phases of the phonograph industry, was also there. As late as the 1930's he was manufacturing a recording stylus, but back in the '90's, while he was still in Washington, he built the first successful spring motor for Columbia. He was suited to be a recording technician because he had been a tool maker for the watchmaking trade, and if anything has to be exact, watchmaking does. And, speaking of

watchmaking, I worked a considerable time in my father's shop, helping him with his watch repairing and practicing the banjo in between. I had a banjo at home and one alongside my repair bench. I remember a garbage collector who heard me playing at home told my mother I was pretty good but not as good as the watchmaker's son downtown. He didn't dream I was the same boy! I wish my father hadn't taken me out of school so soon to help him, but he didn't set much value on higher education.

After a great deal of experimenting and home recording, I decided the time had come to try my luck as a professional recording artist. I made two cylinders at home that sounded fairly decent, so I put them under my arm and went to the Edison plant at West Orange. This was in 1897, and Edison had begun to issue brown wax cylinders regularly the year before.

#### V. First Recording Experiences

The Edison people weren't at all enthusiastic when I first showed up. They gave me a fairly good brush-off, but I finally induced a man to listen to them. I know Walter Miller was in charge of recording, but I don't remember just who it was that I talked into listening. Anyway, I got a job for every Wednesday afternoon, making 40 cylinders, one after the other. They paid me the usual rate—\$1 for each "round." If that doesn't seem much for making 40 records, remember I was making only \$16 a week helping my father repair watches, and \$40 for one afternoon a week wasn't bad. It probably would be the equivalent of \$150 a week now.

My first accompanist was the father of the present-day famous pianist—Frank Banta. He was Frank P. Banta, while his son, who plays for the National Broadcasting Company, is Frank E. I never knew what the P. stood for. The elder Banta was a real old-timer in the phonograph game. He had been at it for years before I got in, and at one time or other he conducted bands and orchestras for practically all the pioneer record companies. You know, Frank—the elder Frank—got his preliminary musical training as a "rough tuner" in a piano factory. That is, he would do the first part of the tuning, and somebody else would come along and put on the finishing touches. In that way he learned to play the piano and was finally good enough to go out and get engagements. I don't think he had any formal musical training. He was just a "natural." He died in 1904 at the early age of 33.

Incidentally, Mrs. Banta is still living and is a very active old lady. When I first saw her she was employed by Walcott and Miller, who were record makers on 14th Street. I went there to buy records and she demonstrated them for me. That was when she was a young girl, before she was married. You asked me if



Fred Van Eps and Jim Walsh, in Roanoke, Va., Tuesday, September 20, 1955

I remember a firm called Burke and Rous that used to make cylinders in Brooklyn, and you say that Rous was a brother of Sam Rous, who made so many records under the name of S. H. Dudley. No, I never heard of them or of the cylinders they were turning out for slot machine use in the early 1900's. I'll bet you never heard of Reed and Dawson, who made lots of cylinders in Newark.

I worked a long time for Edison on that Wednesday afternoon basis. Of course I had competition. Vess Ossman was making lots of records, and Ruby Brooks made some, but Brooks—he was a member of the vaudeville team of Brooks and Denton, and died of lung cancer around 1906—wasn't any real competition. I remember a pair of banjoists, Cullen and Collins, made records for Columbia in Washington, D. C., before Columbia moved its headquarters to New York in 1897.

I continued recording through the early 1900's. I don't know just how many records I made and I doubt that I have books, that would show it, but I know a lot of my banjo records were sold. I was also teaching and playing with orchestras. Sometimes we banjoists would go out and play with orchestras until 2 A.M., then come home and have to prepare a couple of numbers for 10 o'clock that

morning. You notice this 1902 Edison record catalog you showed me lists several selections by me, and this copy of "The Columbia Record" for January, 1904, mentions a seven-inch disc of another banjoist, William Bowen, and myself playing Sousa's "Jack Tar March." That was probably the first disc I made. I don't remember that Bowen and I ever recorded any more duets, and it seems odd that they don't appear to have put this one out in the ten-inch size. Bill Bowen, who is still living in New Jersey and I worked for Vess Ossman one summer, filling engagements Ossman obtained through his booking office. It must have been during that period that we recorded "The Jack Tar March." I didn't do any work for the early Berliner discs, but around 1916 or 1917 some of us recording artists began going to Canada about every six weeks and recording for Berliner, Victor's affiliate there. I don't recall making any cylinders for Columbia. I did lots of work for Zon-o-phone when Eddie King was manager of their artist and repertoire department. When Zon-o-phone folded around 1913, he went with Victor as assistant to John Macdonald (record collectors know him better as the tenor, Harry Macdonough), who was then the head of the "popular" division of Victor's A.

& R. Calvin Child of course headed the Red Seal section.

You asked if I was nervous during my first recording engagement. No, I don't think so. I always practiced slowly, to gain sufficient accuracy, and I was already used to making records at home. They had six or seven horns lined up in racks, because in those days there was no duplicating. Every record was an original. The one in dead center usually was best and brought a higher price. Actually, I didn't pay much attention to the size of horns, the thickness of diaphragms and other technical subjects. I wasn't supposed to. If I had carried tales from one recording laboratory to another I would have been in a hornet's nest.

However, some of the artists weren't above doing that. There was one fellow who slipped parts away from the old U. S. Record Company plant, one part a night, and would slip them back the next morning. They were parts from a duplicating machine which allowed several dozen records to be turned out from each original. Edison didn't have a duplicating device at that time, but he was able to build one with the help of that skulduggery. Of course, there were lots of things about the phonograph that Edison didn't originate, though usually his product was the best of its kind. For instance, he didn't invent the indestructible cylinder, but his Blue Amberol was better than any of the others. I've often wondered just what were the secrets that let him get such marvelous quality into his Diamond Discs. No other company had anything like it. No doubt part of it came from using the hill-and-dale recording method, but what accounted for the rest—some recording method that only he knew, the construction of the reproducer, or what? I believe the Edison reproducer diaphragm was built up with 40 very thin layers of rice paper, coated with shellac. He made thousands of test models before he was satisfied. Incidentally, I've never understood why, when long-playing records were brought out in 1948, they weren't made hill-and-dale instead of lateral cut. The music would have been better and it would have been possible to put almost twice as much on a side. Technicians have tried to explain to me why the change wasn't made, but in view of my own experience manufacturing recording equipment none of their arguments are convincing.

A great improvement in cylinder recording occurred somewhere around 1909 or '10. Edison made the big improvement when he stopped clamping the glass recording diaphragm between rubber gaskets and floated it with wax on the outside. That allowed the whole glass to vibrate. They used just a small aluminum tube connection instead of a lot of mechanism, such as levers and links. Right away the records were twice as good—very clear and natural.

(To be continued)

# FAVORITE PIONEER RECORDING ARTISTS

By JIM WALSH

## FRED VAN EPS

(Continued from the January issue)

### VI. Free-Lance Recording Days

Still relating Fred Van Eps' life story and recording experiences in his own words:

I think my first big break occurred when my first Victor record, "The Burglar Buck," came out in April, 1910. Although the Victor Talking Machine Company had been founded only nine years before, it had already become the dominant American phonograph and record company. The fact that I was good enough for Victor made every other company want me, too. I made my first Columbia solo record a few months after my Victor debut, and soon I was free-lancing for, I suppose, just about every record company of the day. Several years later, when I was one of the Eight Famous Victor Artists, Henry Burr tried to persuade me to sign an exclusive Victor contract. He argued I'd make as much money as I did playing for all comers and wouldn't have to work so hard.

But I couldn't see it his way. I had set a minimum fee of \$100 for any recording engagement, and I col-

lected a good deal more from larger companies like Victor. I figured that if I could make three records in the morning and another two or three in the afternoon at \$100 or more a playing I was doing all right. It certainly seemed good in comparison with the \$1 a round Edison had paid me when I started out—and especially good by contrast with that \$16 a week I used to get, working in my father's watch repair shop.

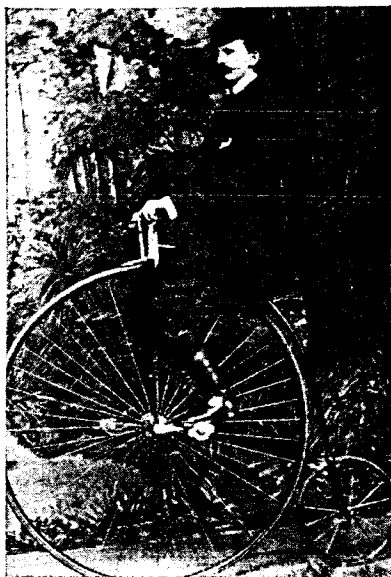
As you remarked just now, I became the dominant banjo recording artist in this country from about the time I began to work for all the companies. Olly Oakley, who has been dead a long time, had the same status in England, and in my estimation he was the best of the English players. He came closer to having an American style than any of the others. It's sad to think of all the talented instrumentalists who have died while I am still going strong at 76. Really, I have never been sick enough to go to bed in my life. Most sickness is in the mind, and I've succeeded in keeping myself convinced I'm in excellent health. An infected tooth is about the worst physical ailment that has ever happened to me. . . . But about those instrumentalists you mentioned men like Samuel Siegel, Valentine, Abt (pronounced AHBT) and Eugene W. Page, who made mandolin records in the early days, and the guitar players—Roy Butin (pronounced Bew-TIN), and Ramseyer, whose first name you said you didn't know but have always imagined to be Hugo. Well, it wasn't Hugo. He used to work with me and his name was Dave. They're all gone now. I always considered Sam Siegel the best of the mandolin men. But I was talking about my becoming, as you said, the leading recording banjoist from 1910 on. Vess Ossman had begun moving around the country a great deal, providing music for hotels in various places, and that probably had something to do with his not making many records between 1910 and his death in 1923, although he did make quite a comeback in 1916-17, when he was with the Eight Famous Victor Artists. (I succeeded him as the banjoist of the troupe when he couldn't get along with the manager, Henry Burr).

And, as I have already said, Ossman no longer practiced consistently

and his work began to deteriorate. I still practice at least two hours a day and, if I am a judge of my work, I'm playing better, thanks to my changed fingering methods, than I did in my younger years.

You were asking me why practically all the Ossman records that had stayed in the Victor catalog a good many years were made over by me. To some extent, it was because of accidents happening to the original masters or defects appearing in the matrices. Then, too, as time went on the methods by which Ossman had recorded became outmoded. However, the records were still popular, and Victor wanted them remade by the latest processes. But since Ossman wasn't readily available and his playing no longer was what it had been, they had me do the remakes, usually with young Frank Banta at the piano. Some of those I made over were "Turkey in the Straw Medley," "Silver Heels" and "Keep Off the Grass." You asked me who played in the Plantation Trio, aside from myself, when it remade the Ossman-Dudley Trio records of "The St. Louis Tickle" and "Dixie Girl March" in the early 1920's. I don't remember just who was with me. The catalog shows "The St. Louis Tickle" was played by a banjo, mandolin and guitar, and "Dixie Girl March" by two banjos and one guitar. My brother Bill was originally a mandolin player, and he may have been one of the group. He also could have played the second banjo in "Dixie Girl." Dave Ramseyer may have been the guitar player. Audley Dudley used to work with me but since he died in 1916 he was out of the question, of course, for recording done in the '20's. I always called Audley "Al." I'm glad to learn his brother George is still living in retirement in Florida.

Oh yes—that Victor record called "A Little Bit of Everything Medley," by Ossman, which you had me listen to, hoping I could identify the songs. The last one, of course, is "Auld Lang Syne," and the second, which takes up most of the record, is an old-time banjo favorite, "Nigger in a Fit." But I can't remember ever hearing the first selection. (Note by Jim Walsh—The song at the begin-



Fred Van Eps' father, John Perry Van Eps, on his high-wheeled bicycle in the 1880's. The elder Van Eps, a watchmaker, died in 1926, aged 81.



Fred Van Eps as a youthful banjoist



Because of the frequency with which Fred Van Eps mentions Billy Murray in his reminiscences, this seems an appropriate time to publish a picture of a rare poster showing young "William Murray" in blackface as a member of the Al G. Field Minstrel Troupe. The poster probably was printed around 1900—a few years before Murray, on Field's advice, changed his first name to Billy, and began his phenomenal recording career. In 1902 his photo appeared, still as William Murray, on the front cover of a song, "A Little Boy in Blue," written by Raymond A. Browne and Theodore Morse. "Teddy" Morse was the first pianist of the Eight Famous Victor Artists, but, at Van Eps' suggestion, was succeeded in 1918 by young Frank Banta.

ning of the record has since been identified as "Angel Gabriel").

#### VII. Van Eps Trio and Banjo Orchestra

One of the great successes of my recording activities from about 1912 to 1922 was the Van Eps Trio. The country was dance crazy in the decade from 1910 to 1920 as it never had been before, and hasn't been since, and I got the Trio together to furnish music both on records and for dances. Our first Victor record was "The Florida Rag." The instrumentation was two banjos—one played by me and the other by my brother Bill—and a piano, played by Felix Arndt. When the next Van Eps Trio record was made we dropped one of the banjos and, at John Macdonald's insistence, substituted drums played by Eddie King. The Victor people thought drums gave a steadier, more insistent

rhythm than a second banjo, but I wasn't "sold" on the drums idea. However, since King was assistant manager of the Victor artist and repertoire department, I felt there wasn't anything I could do except go along. That set-up lasted several years.

I think your readers will be interested in the story of my association with Felix Arndt. He was just a youngster demonstrating music for the Witmark song publishing firm at \$20 a week when we first met. In spite of his German sounding last name, his racial strain was Latin. His father was Italian and his mother a mixture of Spanish and French. She had the French attitude toward being thrifty and playing it safe. When I first proposed to hire Felix to work with me she didn't want him to give up his sure \$20 a week to take a chance on anything else. She

consented though, when I told her I would guarantee the boy \$50 a week, but that if he couldn't make \$100 I didn't want him. Poor Felix had a short life. He died in the 1918 flu epidemic. Before his death he had trouble with his hands and had to stop playing with me. Today he is best remembered by his song, "Nola," named for his wife, which served so long as a theme song for Vincent Lopez. Felix's widow has a studio in Steinway Hall, and *Variety* recently carried a news item telling of her suing a music publishing company for \$11,000 which she claims are due as royalties from the sale of "Nola."

Soon after his association with me began, Felix started making piano and celesta records for Victor, and some of the piano numbers—especially "From Soup to Nuts," "Desecration Rag," "An Operatic Nightmare" and "Nola,"—were big sellers. He also made a great many player piano rolls. It was because the trouble with his hands kept him from playing consistently that I took young Frank Banta out of high school in 1916 to become my duet partner and the pianist of the Van Eps Trio. The youngster, whom Billy Murray used to call, jokingly, "Solid Ivory, the Boy Wonder," was a ten-strike. His playing was a little rough at first, but he soon smoothed out. His father had been dead since 1904, but his mother had gone into the corset business and done a fine job of rearing Frank and a daughter, who has since died. Frank has never married. He still lives with his mother and earns a handsome income as a pianist for NBC. As you remarked, anybody who attended the "John Bieling Day" reunions of recording artists and record collectors in 1948 and 1950 must remember what a brilliant player Frank is, and how willing he was to play accompaniments for everybody who wanted to sing, as well as solos by himself.

To anticipate a little, I was responsible for Frank's becoming the pianist of the Eight Famous Victor Artists. He did so well with me that when I took Ossman's place with the troupe I suggested that young Banta should be hired in the place of Theodore Morse. Teddy Morse was a swell fellow and one of the greatest writers of popular songs this country has known, but he simply couldn't play the piano the way Frank Banta could. Besides, his time was tied up to some extent not only with his own song writing but with being a music manuscript reader for Leo Feist. Frank clicked immediately and stayed with the Eight until Henry Burr disbanded the group some time late in 1927 or early in 1928. That latter year, Frank went abroad as pianist for The Revelers. . . . Speaking of pianists, George Gershwin, before he was famous, used to play sometimes with me at dances. I never used him on records. Getting back to the Van Eps Trio days, I kept on being dissatisfied with using a drummer, but for several years I

couldn't convince John Macdonald that the saxophone, which had become extremely popular, would be a more suitable instrument. But at last I got the best of him. Russell Hunting, the famous pioneer "Casey" monologist, had returned to this country after years abroad as supervisor of Pathé's European recording activities, and was manager of Pathé's New York studio. I talked Russell into letting me make a Van Eps Trio record of a fox-trot called "The Hawaiian Blues," with Nathan Glantz (pronounced GLAHNTZ) playing a sax, in place of the usual drums. It went over well, and when Macdonald heard it he told me to go ahead and use a saxophone from then on in my Victor recordings. The good results we got on Pathé were a challenge to him and he felt he had to meet the challenge. He thought he just couldn't let Pathé get ahead of Victor! Our first Victor with Glantz on the saxophone combined "Teasin' the Cat" and "On the Dixie Highway." From then on, the Van Eps Trio was composed of Banta, Glantz and myself. Afterwards I added Joe Green as a xylophonist and the group was known as the Van Eps Quartet or the Van Eps Specialty Four. Nathan Glantz is dead now, but his son, Nathan, Jr., is a successful musician. Joe Green also is dead, but his brother, George Hamilton Green, who used to be famous as a xylophone player, is still active—as a cartoonist rather than a musician. His drawings frequently appear in *Collier's* and other publications.

The Trio played with almost metronomic precision. I remember that once we made half a dozen "takes" of the same number, and our timing was so exact there was less than three seconds difference between the fastest and the slowest.

In 1914 I came along with what the record companies called the Van Eps Banjo Orchestra, although that term was somewhat misleading. There never were more than five instruments—hardly enough for an orchestra. The make-up of the group, as well as the membership, varied from time to time. Nearly always there were two banjos—sometimes my brother played the other one—and of course we had Felix Arndt at the piano. You just mentioned that the Banjo Orchestra played accompaniments for some of Arthur Collins' Pathé records. Even though you've shown me the records I still don't remember anything about playing those accompaniments. In fact, there's a lot that at this late date I don't remember. No, I don't remember, either, playing accompaniments for Collins and Harlan duets and Porter and Harlan comic sketches on Victor. But you've got the records to prove I did. I do remember, though, that we took a lot of classics and made dance numbers of them. Chaminade's "Scarface" was one, and there was another we called "Tambourines and Ranges." Then there was a prohibition number—oh yes, "The Alcoholic Blues!"—in which we played "How Dry I Am" and other time-honored drinking songs. You say you

have a sapphire ball record of the Trio playing "The Alcoholic Blues" on a Meteor disc, put out by the Meteor Record Company of Piqua, Ohio. No, we never played for any company with a name like that. That was probably one of the several disguises under which Pathé records were issued—just as Columbias used to be sold under all sorts of labels. I am constantly meeting people who tell me they have records by me on Superior or some other brand I know I never played for. And then I know they have got hold of an off-brand which is just some formerly famous line disguising itself behind false whiskers.

#### VIII. Phonograph Boom Days

After the first World War began in 1914, the phonograph and record business began to boom. The "Big Three"—Victor, Columbia and Edison—couldn't increase production enough to meet the demand, and something like 50 new companies sprang up to make "talking machines" while there was also a large increase in the number of firms making records. However, since Victor and Columbia between them controlled the patents on the more popular lateral type record, the newcomers—Aeolian-Vocalion, Starr, Okeh, Paramount and others—had to make their discs on the hill-and-dale principle, like Edison and Pathé. Henry Burr even had his own company for a year or two—the Parquette Record Company, which turned out seven-inch double-faced Paroket records that sold for a quarter. I made some for them. He lured away Victor's recording director, Walter B. Rogers, but the market was too

limited for that type of record and it wasn't a success. Burr made huge amounts of money as a recording artist and as manager of the Eight, but he also lost scads in such schemes as running a silver fox farm and starting a music publishing business. He and I had a banjo factory together, but I'll tell more about that later.

Anyway, as I said, the record business boomed. I remember the Victor figures for 1918. Their gross business was \$204,000,000, and they thought that could never be beaten. It seemed the saturation point had been reached. That's the more surprising because both Victor and Edison turned over much of their factory space that year for defense work. . . . No, I don't remember making any Little Wonder records—those 5½ inch, single-faced discs that sold in ten cent stores for a dime each. Since, as you say, they were made under Columbia patents, they probably copied the first half of an ordinary Columbia record onto a Little Wonder.

I was speaking of Victor and Columbia having a strangle hold on lateral-cut patents. The only fellow who was able to get around them, until Gennett brought a suit in 1919 that broke the patents monopoly, was Victor Emerson. You'll remember I mentioned Vic Emerson was with the old U. S. Record Company in Newark the first time I went there back in the '90's. When U. S. folded he became a Columbia recording expert. He left Columbia in 1916 and started the Emerson Record Company. In order to make a record that would play in the ordinary Victor or Columbia position, he developed a way



The Van Eps Trio (sometimes called the Van Eps-Banta Trio) about 1919: Fred Van Eps, banjo; Nathan Glantz, saxophone, and Frank Banta, piano. In those days Van Eps signed his photos, "Trio-ly Yours."





The recent Davy Crockett furore should add interest to this photo of the Eight Famous Victor Artists at the Alamo in 1919. Top row, left to right: Frank Banta, Monroe Silver, Frank Croxton, Henry Burr, Billy Murray and c1 unidentified man—probably a Victor dealer. Front row—John Meyer, Albert Campbell, and (in striped shirt) Fred Van Eps.

of cutting the grooves at a 45-degree angle and called it the universal cut. Theoretically, an Emerson record would play either laterally or vertically, but the thing was a makeshift compromise. You could hear it fairly well in a lateral position, but the vertical rendition was barely audible. As far as I know, that was the only "compromise cut." Of course, there never was a lateral cut cylinder.

As best I can remember, I recorded for 14 or 15 companies between 1916 and 1922, when I virtually gave up recording work. There may have been more. I'm sure there weren't many in the Eastern United States that I missed. Of course I had worked for Edison from the very beginning of my recording career, except for a period of two or three years. I had an argument with them about the numbers to be recorded, and it ended with my "going on strike" until they saw things my way. Frank Banta was my accompanist on nearly all my recording dates, except that Edison insisted on using John F. Burkhardt. They reasoned that since they had a staff accompanist on salary, there was no sense in paying Frank to play in Burkhardt's place. Bill Cronkhite was Edison's critic, and he was always gumming the artists up with his odd ideas.

As I know you've often heard, Cronkhite was so conscientious and so fault-finding—and maybe so afraid of Thomas A. Edison—that he almost worked Edison artists to death. I saw a group that included Ada Jones, Billy Murray and a male quartet work all day to make a cylinder that satisfied Cronkhite. It contained a lot of sound effects. Maybe it was "Come, Josephine, In My Flying Machine." Anyway, something went

wrong every trial, and they were all worn out before it was done. Ada Jones never troubled to learn a song until she had a date to record it, so that slowed them up.

Another odd thing I remember is that elaborate duplicating device Pathé had. I don't mean I was allowed to examine it—the Frenchman who had made it and brought it to this country didn't allow anybody to operate or even look at it but himself—but it was a wonder. It recorded on cylinders 14 inches long, and from these they dubbed discs that were 10%, 11½ and 13¼ inches in diameter. The playing time was the same, but the larger records were louder. Those were the hill-and-dale

Pathés, played with a sapphire ball, but they could also dub lateral cuts or cylinders if they wanted to. The Pathé dubbing system was much better than the Edison. After Edison had his disastrous factory fire in 1915, they quit recording Blue Amberol cylinders direct and started copying them from the Diamond Discs. This was often poorly and carelessly done, and the cylinders lost tone quality in consequence. But that Pathe dubbing system was amazing. Not even Russell Hunting knew how it worked—he just knew it did!

Before I tell of my experiences as a member of Eight Famous Victor Artists, I'd like to say something about the fun we had in the old recording days. I have an affectionate recollection of McGirr's restaurant at 37th Street and Sixth Avenue. It's still there. That was where most of the recording talent ate lunch during engagements. Several studios were in the neighborhood, so the gang got together to chew the fat, discuss the recording news and occasionally swap a few scandals! Victor's recording laboratory was on 38th Street. Columbia was across the street in the Joseph W. Stern Music Publishing building, and Pathe's lab was on 37th, about half a block away. Edison was at 79 Fifth Avenue, and Aeolian-Vocalion also was not far away on 43rd Street, back of Aeolian Hall.

There was another restaurant we frequented at 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue. I can't remember its name, but it's out of business now, so nobody's feelings will be hurt by my telling this anecdote. We used to call it "The Greasy Spoon." One day Frank Banta's mother called up, wanting to speak to her son. She couldn't remember the name, so, unable to think of anything else, she asked: "Is this the Greasy Spoon?" Whoever took the call didn't relish the title, and hung up on her without saying whether or not it was the Greasy Spoon!

(To be continued)

## MORE ON DOUBLE TAKES

(Continued from page 31)

Renato Zanelli (as tenor): Otello-Dio mi potevi Gramola DB1173 (2-052381) (CR2095 11 A)  
Renato Zanelli (as tenor): Otello-Niun mi tema Victor Orth. 7020B (CR2094 111 A)  
Renato Zanelli (as tenor): Otello-Dio mi potevi Gramola DB1173 (2-052380) (CR2094 111 A)

### ADDITIONS:

1. a) Lucrezia Bori Victor 12" 38475 Boheme-Mi chiamano Mimì (Take 2) without "narrative" at end of aria.  
b) Lucrezia Bori Victrola 12" 6048A Boheme-Mi chiamano Mimì-with narrative at end of aria.
2. a) Apollo Granforte 10" Gramola DA1053 (7-52433) Zaza-Zaza, piccola singara (BM 809 1)  
b) Apollo Granforte 10" Eng. HMV DA1053 (7-52433) Zaza-Zaza piccola singara (BM 1138 1)  
(Apollo Granforte 10" Mauve & Gold HMV AGSA23 (7-52433) Zaza-Zaza, piccola singara (BM 1138 1)
3. a) Amelita Galli-Curci Victor 12" 74499 Rigoletto-Caro nome-with recitative (Take 4)  
a) Amelita Galli-Curci HMV 2-053126 (A18596) Rigoletto-Caro nome with recitative (Take 4)  
a) Amelita Galli-Curci HMV DB257 Rigoletto-Caro nome-with recitative (Take 4)  
b) Amelita Galli-Curci Victrola 12" 74499 Rigoletto-Caro nome-without recitative (Take 6)  
b) Amelita Galli-Curci Victrola 12" 6126 Rigoletto-Caro nome-without recitative (Take 6)

(While most collectors already know of the acoustical versions of Galli-Curci's Caro nome, I felt that they might be interested in knowing that they were carried over on the European pressings, too. However, Victor 74499 (Take 4) was never doubled on American Vict.)

Kindest regards,

Bill  
William Vioti

# FAVORITE PIONEER RECORDING ARTISTS

By JIM WALSH

## FRED VAN EPS

(Continued from February issue)

### VIII. The Eight Famous Victor Artists

Fred Van Eps continues his reminiscences, with most of this installment being devoted to his experiences as a member of the Eight Famous Victor Artists troupe:

My memory goes back a long way, but sometimes, like everybody's memory, it fails me. I clearly recall the blizzard of 1888—probably the worst storm ever recorded in the Eastern United States—and the trouble I, a boy of about ten, had getting around for several days after the big snow-fall.

But up to now I've forgotten to mention that I made a few records under an assumed name. They were made for Pathé, which went in more strongly for aliases than any other record company, and they were duets with an accordion player, Dan Boudini. I was called "Edward Boynton." I notice that here in Roanoke you have an architectural firm by the name of Smithy and Boynton. But I don't have any idea who chose that name of Boynton for me to use when I played with Boudini. We made "Down South" (20433) and "Silver Heels" (20382).

Speaking of names, assumed and real, of course I'm resigned by this time to having the Eps in my name misspelled Epps. And frequently people call me Mr. Epps, seeming to think Van is my middle name. Shakespeare said "What's in a name?" but sometimes having the right name means a lot to a professional musician.

I think I'll talk now about my years as a member of the Eight Famous Victor Artists one of the most interesting periods of my musical life. I joined the troupe late in 1917 or early 1918 when it was still known as the Record Makers. The title identifying the aggregation with the Victor Talking Machine Company didn't come into use until five of the members—Billy Murray, Henry Burr, Albert Campbell, John Meyer and Frank Croxton—signed exclusive Victor contracts in the summer of 1920. The other three—Frank Banta, Monroe Silver and I—continued to free-lance. Some observers said the Eight had the most talent and the most remark-

ably varied gifts ever packed into one small concert ensemble. At the height of his fame Rudy Vallee remarked that the Eight Famous Victor Artists were his "ideal of show business."

When I joined I took the place of my fellow banjoist, Vess Ossman, who didn't get along with the manager, Burr. As I have already said, that swell fellow Teddy Morse, the song writer, was the pianist, but he gave way in 1918 to young Frank Banta, who had begun working as my accompanist when he was 17. Arthur Collins and Byron Harlan, the famous "coon song" comedians, were also with the troupe, but Collins and Burr never did hit it off, and Burr didn't consider Collins' style of singing well adapted to work with the Peerless Quartet, although Collins had been its baritone since 1907. Their bickering came to a head, and Collins was dropped. John Meyer, who had been singing bass, became the quartet baritone, and Frank Croxton stepped in as basso.

Harlan left with Collins and was succeeded by Monroe Silver, a brilliant comedian who specialized in monologs about "Cohen." He also sang well in a mock-Yiddish style. I used to tell "Mike" Silver (Billy Murray, with whom he roomed on tour, had nicknamed him Mike) that he had ability enough of his own not to need to copy the "Cohen on the Telephone" act which Joe Hayman had made popular, but Mike always insisted on doing a telephone skit in his public appearances.

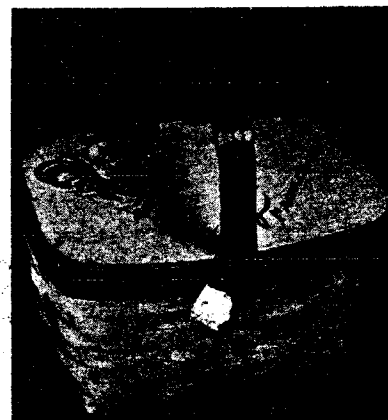
Before I get down to telling of my travels with the Eight, I'd like to answer a question I am often asked: "How did the Peerless Quartet (Campbell, Burr, Meyer and Croxton) and the Sterling Trio (Campbell, Burr and Meyer) ever find time to rehearse so many numbers when they were free-lancing, and where did they meet to rehearse?" I don't know exactly myself how they found the time except that, as Al Campbell used to say, they rehearsed and recorded in three shifts almost around the clock, but I can tell where they rehearsed. John Meyer had an uncle, John Wilbur, who gave him a florist shop, on Third Avenue, New York. In gratitude to his uncle, John called himself John Wilbur when he

first made records but soon changed to his right name. Throughout the years he was with the Peerless, from 1911 through 1925, he continued to operate this shop and he went back to it after he left the quartet. While he was on tour somebody managed it for him. Well, anyway, John had a piano in a back room, and it was there that the members of the troupe used to get together and practice. John Meyer was a very good pianist and he made many of the trio and quartet's arrangements. Sometimes he and Frankie Banta played duets in our concerts.

One thing I learned was, we didn't have to rough it with the Record Makers or the Eight Victor Artists. We weren't allowed to. Burr insisted that we wear evening clothes in giving our performances, and that led the impishly irreverent Mike Silver to dub us "The Pallbearers." After I left, I understand, it was decided to appear in street clothes as a touch of informality designed to loosen up the audience, but we were strictly formal in my day. When we went on our three-month tours throughout the United States and Canada we stayed at the best hotels, and were never allowed to carry baggage. Even if the concert hall or theatre was only a few blocks from our hotel we went in taxis. I remember one time we were in Houston, Texas, and I told a taxi driver I wanted to go to the Municipal Auditorium where we were to appear that night.

"Why," the driver said, the Auditorium is just across the street from this hotel."

"O. K.," I said. "Drive me there!" Although Burr was the organizer and manager of the troupe, its business affairs were in the hands of an Allentown, Pennsylvania, Victor dis-



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tributor - Philip W. Simon - who maintained a booking office at 1658 Broadway, New York. Simon was a nice fellow whose assistant, L. C. Mountcastle, attended to the actual booking. After Burr's recording career ended he was for a time the program director for the Columbia Broadcasting System and Mountcastle was his right-hand man.

Henry Burr had a genius for making money, but almost as much ability to lose it in fantastic ways. For a year or two he had the Paroquette Record Company, which was a failure. He sank a lot of money in a silver fox farm, and lost even more heavily in a sheet music publishing venture. But he and I did well for several years, manufacturing and selling a banjo I had designed, and of course the Eight was very profitable until the "talkies" came along and, for a long time, killed the appeal of "live" attractions. Too, he was one of the highest paid recording artists.

On one occasion, after the troupe had filled an engagement, the manager of the theater handed me a check. For some reason he had got the impression I was managing the show. I looked at the check and almost fainted. It was for exactly twice as much as the maximum I had imagined Burr could possibly be getting for our services. When I told the other boys, human nature asserted itself and we decided to strike Henry for a raise. At Mike Silver's suggestion, we put on false beards, to make us look like anarchists, and, so to speak, "bearded the lion in his den." Ever afterwards, whenever we decided Hank was becoming too prosperous for his own good and that we should have more money, we put on our beards—some red and some black—and went in for a heart-to-heart talk. I never tried to find out what the other fellows were getting, but it was generally understood that Billy Murray's take was tops. And it should have been. He was not only a marvelous master of ceremonies but also the most popular recording artist this country has ever known.

That business of putting on false facial fungus was the start of the Order of Beards, about which you were telling me. That was after my time, but I got a laugh. Jim, out of your story of how the Eight used to put on those false beards and parade through trains, brandishing hatchets and scaring passengers by pretending to be Russian anarchists. Finally, as you said, Burr decided he wanted to be a member and asked to be allowed to join. The boys kept him waiting in an anteroom for two hours and then Billy Murray came out and showed him a hat into which seven black pellets had been dropped. Every body in the troupe had blackballed Burr! (Mike Silver had slipped off the train at a convenient spot and bought some pieces of licorice that were rolled up into balls.) And, as you say, Hank became so furious the other seven decided in a hurry to let him become a full-fledged member of the Order of Beards.

Burr insisted on paying off in cash on Saturday nights. The boys used



FRED VAN EPS, lower right, in an unidentified recording studio with other artists of that period.

to kick about that because they considered the display of so much money an open invitation to a stick-up, but Burr argued that a hotel lobby was a good pay-place and handing out stacks of greenbacks was good business because "it looks prosperous." Then, as you say, someone slipped into Monroe Silver's room in a Columbus, Ohio, hotel, while he was taking a bath and not only stole his week's salary but also took a ring his dead mother had given him. Mike didn't mind the money so much—there would be another pay-day next week—but he did mourn for the ring, which he never recovered. Burr lost a \$700 ring in the Hotel Muhlenbach in Kansas City, but later got it back.

Henry and his wife were both fat and heavy eaters. One day down in Texas we watched them packing away a huge meal. Mike remarked: "They're reducing."

"Reducing?" somebody else said incredulously, and Mike replied: "Yes, reducing the food supply!"

I got many a laugh from Billy Murray's ability to make off-the-cuff funny remarks. Sometimes Billy talked a slang that was almost a form of shorthand. On one occasion he was telling about somebody buying a good second-hand Cadillac car for a thousand dollars.

"Gee, just think of it!" Billy exclaimed. "A Cad for a thou!"

Al Campbell and Mike Silver liked to roam, after the show, about any city in which we were playing. When they got tired of sightseeing they'd drop into a movie, picking what looked like the worst picture they could find. Then they'd take turns watching and sleeping. One would watch the picture a few minutes while the other slept, then wake up, briefly outline the plot up to then, and go to sleep himself. Maybe they'd watch

and sleep through a couple of screenings rather than get up and go to the hotel.

Neither Mike or Al drank, and neither did Billy. Burr had been a heavy drinker as a very young man, but he had sworn off and he never touched a drop when I was with the troupe. I'll bet you didn't know that before he came to New York and began his musical career he was a candy salesman in his native Canada. He must have been a very young salesman, for he was only 20 when he began making Columbia records in 1902.

As for myself, I used to go to the beer-and-beefsteak parties which Victor gave each year for its male artists, but nowadays I don't touch anything alcoholic. Neither do I smoke. A specialist who has performed autopsies tells me that nobody would ever inhale cigarettes if the lungs of dead smokers were put on public display. He says the mass of black tar and other harmful substances revealed by a lung autopsy is really frightening.

In spite of looking, as Billy Murray used to say, as if I don't have a spare pound of flesh on me, I've always been remarkably healthy. I've never been ill except that I once had an infected tooth. Most illness is in the mind. I'm still looking forward to the future and still have a zest for living. Never let yourself feel you're old and washed up or you'll lose your incentive for keeping on. There's always something worth doing around the corner. That's why I've kept up my banjo practice, and why I can truthfully say I'm playing better today, thanks to my change of technique, than I did when I was at the peak of my recording career.

One thing I'm proud of is the fact that I've never had a traffic accident,

and I've been driving since 1910. Whenever I'm driving over unfamiliar territory and know I'm going back that same way, I make a point of looking back and seeing the territory unroll behind me. In that way, I remember what it looks like and am not likely to lose my way when I begin the return trip. . . I wish I could have kept my hair as thick and glossy as Al Campbell did. His hair was jet black, and when he died, aged 75, in 1947, there were very few traces of gray.

#### IX. Van Eps - Burr Corporation

During my years with the Eight, Henry Burr and I formed the Van Eps - Burr Corporation and marketed the Van Eps Recording Banjo, modeled after the one I used in my recording and concert work. There was a popular impression that I used a steel-back banjo, but this one had an aluminum resonator with a sound hole in the head, which was made of calfskin.

When I left the troupe in 1922 I took over the sale of the banjo, and it remained on the market until about 1930, when the depression showed up. By that time recording had become electrified, and the loud volume produced by that type of banjo wasn't needed any more. Better results could be obtained with a solid head. I gave banjo lessons for a time, but as the instrument, which had once been so popular, lost its appeal I went into my present business. I'll tell more about that later. I'm happy to say it has been a great success, and I've made most of my money in it. Luckily, I've done so well that if I should live to be 108 I'll still have more money than I'm likely to spend.

I ceased to consider myself a recording artist after I left the Eight, but it seems I did some recording I've forgotten about. You've mentioned several Edison records, such as "Darkies' Dream" and "Darkies' Awakening" and "The Lonesome Mama Blues" which I made for Edison in 1923, and I even made Edison records of "I'm Sitting On Top of the World" and "Dinah" in 1926. I know I did because you played the records for me, but I don't have any recollection of making them.

And now I believe this would be a good place to insert, for the benefit of HOBBIES readers, some notes I jotted down on March 13, 1935, about the history and development of the five-string banjo. I headed it, "America's Own."

#### X Van Eps Article On Banjo

Not everyone knows the banjo is a native instrument and the only one developed in this country; and when I say banjo I mean the original form, having five gut strings and played with bare fingers — the only type used up to 30 years ago.

The so-called dance era brought into use numerous variations — tenor, plectrums, etc. — all strung with wire and played with some kind of a tool. These were easy to play.

The earliest form of musical instrument was a tree stump hollowed out, with a vibrating string stretched across the top. If you sawed this off and put a handle on it you would have a sort of banjo. Almost from man's first attempt to build an instrument, banjo-shaped affairs were used.



The Van Eps Quartet photographed in an unidentified recording studio. Left to right: Frank Banta, piano; the late Joe Green, xylophone; the late Nathan Glantz, saxophone, and Fred Van Eps, banjo. The photo was probably taken in 1920.

The banjo has been associated with the Negro, and while it is true that the slaves brought it from Africa in the form of the "banya," it took an Irishman, Joe Sweeney, to put it in its present form with its five strings and rim. . . . There's a memorial to Sweeney at his home town, Appomattox, Virginia.

No other instrument has a more interesting history. It grew up with the minstrels and you had better try to make a ham sandwich without ham than stage a minstrel show without a banjo. . . . Starting about 1885 and lasting about ten years the banjo became a fad and everybody plunked one. The then Prince of Wales, who later became King Edward VII, started the craze in England, and was promptly dubbed "Prince Tum-Tum."

The next stage was that of the college clubs; you need only ask Dad to find out what an institution the Banjo Club was and what it meant to belong to one. The man who graduated from college twenty years ago is still either playing a five-string banjo or longing to hear one played.

#### WHO MADE HIGHEST TYPE BANJOS?

S. S. Stewart of Philadelphia was a manufacturer who spent his life improving and elevating the banjo. He was tireless in his efforts and intolerant of the scoffers, and told them that at one time the violin was said to be no musical instrument. Stewart said the banjo was limited only by the performer's ability, and time has proved him correct.

Since the symphony orchestra is supposed to contain all musical colors, the time is not far distant when the banjo will be a part of these organizations. You can't get that certain timbre without the combination of catgut and calf skin.

After the before-mentioned banjo craze there was the usual reaction,

but when the old-time Edison recording artist, Ruby Brooks, began playing in Tom Gould's cafe, which was a rendezvous for fashionable people, New York society began using banjos as an accompaniment for dancing. Brooks teamed up with Harry Denton, and not to have them at your party was the worst social blunder.

The banjo has been crossed with other fretted instruments. If you put a mandolin neck and strings on a banjo body, it becomes a banjo-mandolin. If you reverse the process and put a banjo neck and strings on a mandolin body it becomes a mandolin-banjo. In 1898 there appeared an automatic banjo housed in a glass case and operated with a perforated paper roll which controlled buttons for stopping strings and vacuum bellows which operated steel picks. This was a popular piece of saloon furniture.

#### PROFESSIONAL JEALOUSY

An extremely odd thing about the professional banjo players was their jealousy — not ordinary professional jealousy, but an ACUTE variety. If you were an advanced student and paid for tuition you would not be shown anything if there was danger of your becoming too good. During (Continued on page 35)

#### MUSIC—MISCELLANEOUS

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in its "Old Curiosity Shop" album. But in the last few months Victor has reissued five more of her recordings on its Label "X" including the following "When a Woman Loves a Man," "I'd Rather Be Blue," "Cooking Breakfast For the One You Love," "Second Hand Rose," and "If You Want the Rainbow."

#### A FANNY BRICE DISCOGRAPHY— Columbia Records recorded in 1916

A1973 (name spelled Fannie Bryce) 1  
Don't Know Whether to Do it or Not/  
Rhoda Bernard - Nathan.

A2122 (name spelled Fannie Brice) If  
We Could Only Take Her Word (2  
parts).

Victor Records recorded 1921-2.

45263 Second Hand Rose/My Man

45303 I'm An Indian/O, How I Hate That  
Fellow Nathan

45323 Becky is Back in the Ballet/ The  
Sheik of Avenue B

Victor records, electrically recorded from  
1928-30.

21168 My Man (two versions released)/  
The Song of the Sewing Machine

21211 Mrs. Cohen at the Beach (2 parts)

21815 If You Want the Rainbow (You  
Must Have the Rain/I'd Rather Be  
Blue

22310 When a Woman Loves a Man/  
Cooking Breakfast for the One You  
Love

Capitol Records, c. 1947

Album No. DC 3081 (78 rpm) Includes  
the following:

Baby Snooks Learns to Tell the Truth

Baby Snooks Learns to be Good

Baby Snooks Learns to be Clean

Baby Snooks Learns Table Manners

Baby Snooks Learns About Crossing  
Streets

Baby Snooks Learns to Be Kind to  
Animals

Fanny Brice Reissues:

Biltmore 1016 My Man (1921 version)/

Helen Morgan - Bill

RCA Victor Album LCT 1112 "Old Curiosity Shop." Includes the 1921 version

of "My Man." (12 inch 33-1/3 rpm;  
also available in 45 rpm)

Label "X" LVA 1006 (12 inch 33-1/3  
rpm)

Fanny Brice - When a Woman  
Loves a Man, I'd Rather Be Blue,

Cooking Breakfast for the One You  
Love, Second Hand Rose, If You Want

the Rainbow/Helen Morgan - Body and  
Soul, Why Was I Born, Mean to Me,

Frankie and Johnnie, Can't Help Lov-  
ing That Man, Something to Remem-

ber You By.

A NOTICE TO ALL COLLECTORS  
OF CYLINDER RECORDINGS:

For a considerable amount of time  
now Duane Deakins and Tom Grati-  
telo on the West Coast have been en-  
gaged in the Herculean task of try-  
ing to compile a complete list of all  
the cylinder records issued in this  
country. The first part (Edison 4  
minute wax amberol records - popu-  
lar series) has now been completed  
and indexed and should be avail-  
able this Summer to all those who  
are interested. Duane Deakins (1057  
Paloma St., Stockton 4, Calif.) would  
be interested in hearing from all  
collectors and dealers who would be  
interested in subscribing to this se-  
ries so that he can have some idea  
of how many copies to have printed.

They are now engaged in complet-  
ing the regular Blue amberol series  
and are lacking information on Num-  
bers 2960, 3210, 3743, 4791 and 4819.  
They have information on all of the  
Edison 2 min. wax gold moulded rec-  
ords from 8000 to 10575 except No.  
8002. If anyone can supply infor-  
mation on any of these numbers  
would you please write Dr. Deakins  
at the above address. I feel that this  
is a most important undertaking and  
that they should be assisted by col-  
lectors as far as possible.

## FAVORITE PIONEER RECORDING ARTISTS

(Continued from page 32)

the first days of the phonograph the  
banjo was about the only instrument  
that recorded well and was used ex-  
tensively. Violin records were out  
of the question - the sound went  
in so sweetly and came out so sour!

George L. Lansing, a well known  
banjoist of Boston, wrote "The  
Darkies' Dream" as a solo and it  
became such a hit that nearly all the  
bands in the country played it.

Now let's tell our right names and  
have an understanding as to just  
what a banjo is:

It's an instrument with five strings  
(four long, one short) and not what  
you have heard in the dance orches-  
tras. Those steel strings instruments  
played with picks or plectrums. I  
just can't call musical instruments,  
but they filled a gap in the dance  
orchestras of the '20's. They were a  
part of the rhythm section and sup-  
posed to add to the band. Harry  
Reser, I think, was, and is, the best  
player of the so-called tenor banjo.  
During the several years following  
World War I more tenor banjos were  
made and sold than any other music-  
making tool. Since then the tenor  
banjo has largely given way to the  
superior tone of the guitar.

### THE NATIONAL INSTRUMENT

Practically everyone knows that the  
Stars and Stripes is our national em-  
blem. Almost every moron knows  
the goldenrod is our national flower,  
but if you were to walk up the street  
and ask the first six men you met  
what our national instrument is you  
would probably get little information.  
If, after you, told them what it is  
you asked what a banjo really is,  
you would be apt to get much less  
information.

Scotland has its bagpipe; Italy the  
violin, and so on down the line. So  
it is high time everyone knew our  
national musical instrument, the only  
one developed in the United States,  
is the banjo - especially so since it  
has had the most interesting career  
of any.

The foregoing was written more  
than 20 years ago when the banjo  
was near its lowest ebb. During  
the past year there have been grati-  
fying signs of a revival of interest  
in the orthodox five-string variety,  
as was evidenced last summer when  
the August 15 issue of LIFE con-  
tained an article on "The Banjo  
Boom." The article didn't mention a  
fellow named Fred Van Eps, who has  
probably been actively booming the  
banjo longer than anyone else now  
alive. But, Jim, you took care of  
that to some extent by writing a  
reply that appeared in the September  
5 issue. You say they cut your letter  
of more than a page down to five  
lines - but, at any rate, it let  
LIFE'S readers know that I am still  
living and playing the time-honored  
five-string banjo!

(To be continued)

## A "Limited Edition" Record By Edith Helena and Domenico Russo

By JIM WALSH

When I attended the John Bieling  
Day Memorial observance at Garden  
City, New York, in September, 1948,  
I met a charming lady who had won  
world-wide fame as the operatic so-  
prano, Edith Helena. As one of the  
organizers of the party I was so  
busy with many duties that I had  
less opportunity to talk with Madame  
Helena than I liked, but I still hope

to have the happiness of meeting her  
again.

Meanwhile, I was recently over-  
joyed to receive an autographed copy  
of a ten-inch long-play record con-  
stituting a recital by Edith Helena  
and her late husband, Domenico Rus-  
so, a noted Italian tenor of the past  
generation, who was born in 1874 and  
died in 1932. The record is, without  
exaggeration, a limited editions pro-  
duction because the pressing has been  
restricted to 100 copies—which means  
it undoubtedly will become a choice  
collector's item. It is obtainable for  
\$5, postpaid, from Arthur E. Knight,  
81 Edgewood Avenue, Cranston 5,  
Rhode Island, a gifted young pianist  
and authority on operatic and con-  
cert recordings, who frequently con-  
tributes to that fascinating English  
publication, *The Record Collector*.

Included in the two faces of the  
long-player are three solos by Rus-  
so, which were made in 1907 and  
1911, but have never hitherto been  
published; re-recordings of 4 numbers  
sung by Madame Helena from 1903  
to 1923; three songs electrically re-  
corded by her for private use from  
1953 to 1955, and a spoken introduc-  
tion in which the wonderful little  
lady of almost 80 graciously ex-  
presses her pleasure at authorizing  
the issuance of her beloved husband's  
legendary recordings. Mr. Knight fur-  
nishes the piano accompaniment for  
the electrically recorded solos.

Despite the technical defects, such  
as fairly high surface noise and oc-  
casional pitch wavers in the old re-  
cords' piano background, this LP is  
a joy to hear in well nigh its entire-  
ty. My one disappointment was in  
the copying of the 1923 Edison Dia-  
mond Disc originally issued as "Nov-  
elty Imitation Medley," and contain-  
ing Madame Helena's famous imita-  
tion of a violin playing "Kiss Me  
Again," and her singing of "The Last  
Rose of Summer" in which she in-  
troduces an amazing high note of F  
above high C. This record is more  
"forward" and "realistic" than any  
other of the acoustically recorded  
numbers, but the tone is rather  
coarse and the scratch seems more  
pronounced than when the Edison  
record is played on a New Edison  
phonograph. However, I have never  
yet heard dubbings of Diamond Discs  
that seemed entirely satisfactory, so  
there is no wonder that to my ears  
this one falls somewhat short.

The Russo numbers are heard first  
on side one. They include "La donna  
é mobile," from "Rigoletto," which  
the tenor sings with the proper rol-  
licking abandon and gusto. It is very  
well recorded by 1907 standards. To  
my perception the best of the Russo  
records is the second, "O Paradiso,"  
in which the beauty and passion of  
his voice are genuinely thrilling. I  
wonder how many other hearers will  
find a resemblance, as I thought I  
did, between his voice and that of  
another great Italian singer, Giovan-  
ni Zenatello. Tosti's "Ideale," a song  
for which I have never especially  
cared, is sung extremely well with  
consummate mastery of the melodic  
line. These last two numbers were  
recorded in 1911.

# FAVORITE PIONEER RECORDING ARTISTS

By JIM WALSH

## FRED VAN EPS

(Continued from March issue)

### VIII. The Eight Famous Victor Artists

I have had and am still having, an interesting and what I suppose most people would consider a successful life, but the things that give me most pleasure nowadays are the knowledge that my children are doing well and the memories of the 43 years companionship I had with my beloved wife, "Flossie."

I had four sons. One, John, named for my father, was killed in a car wreck in 1945. Of the remaining boys, Fred, Jr., is the oldest. He was the arranger for Paul Whiteman until Whiteman went out of the orchestra business. Now he arranges for Raymond Scott's "Hit Parade" telecast seen on Saturday nights. He is in New York.

The two other boys are in California. Robert, a gifted pianist, is with M-G-M, where he is an arranger. George, who has been well known for many years as a dance band musician, is free-lancing with his guitar. He is the author of "The Van Eps Method" of guitar playing. He's been in a lot of films lately, but I haven't seen them. One is "The Pete Kelley

Blues," starring Jack Webb. People frequently tell me, "I saw George in the talkies last night." Although I've lived in New Jersey all my life, I'm planning to move my laboratory to California, where I can be with Rob and George. Rob is well known as a writer on musical subjects and has written a book, "The Physics of Piano Technique." He has been my accompanist in the recordings I have made privately during recent years.

Which reminds me that this would be a good time to list the accompanists I have had, in the order in which they played for me. They are: William E. Mac Clymont, Frank P. Banta, Charles L. Van Baar, Belle Harty, Charles A. Prince, Felix Arndt, George Gershwin, Frank E. Banta, and Robert Van Eps.

My wife was Florence Schoffstall, of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Her father was a contractor who took out the coal pillars from the mines and substituted wooden supports. At first the coal pillars were left in the mines for safety's sake, but then it was found that they could be removed and the wooden ones left in their place.

Now I come to the trip Flossie and I took to Europe. It was a wonderful

experience, but it had what I suppose playwrights would call a tragic ending, at least a sad one for me.

You know, Flossie had almost an obsession for England and everything English. All her life she had wanted to go there. Mention almost any castle or cathedral and she could tell you its history. She used to read Pepys' Diary in bed before dropping off to sleep. It was her Bible. Well, we talked for years about going abroad, but somehow never actually made the start. Then something seemed to tell me: "If you are ever going to take that European trip you'd better get busy!" So I told Florence to get ready—we were going.

And we did. We sailed on the Queen Elizabeth on April 7, 1954. But we had plenty of preliminary trouble. As I've already mentioned, my birth certificate didn't give my first name, but merely said I was a male whose last name was Van Eps. Finally, I found a program of a recital in which I played the violin when I was eight years old. It was dated, and it gave my full name, Fred Van Eps, and mentioned my age. I had it photographed, sent it to Washington, and the trouble was cleared up. I never was able to find any proof that my wife had ever been born, but everything eventually worked out.

We had a wonderful time abroad. British hospitality is marvelous. No one has ever been treated any better than the English treated us. My fellow musicians gave two dinners in our honor and we were beautifully entertained at many private parties. A friend, Mrs. Fay Shields, went with us. Both Flossie and I were a hundred per cent Americans, but we certainly fell in love with England. That is, I did; she had always loved it.

We were abroad almost nine weeks. We went to Land's End and South-down, and made a trip to Scotland, where we went up above Loch Lo-

### JIM WALSH WANTS TO BUY

Old phonograph record catalogs and supplements (mostly prior to 1915); back copies of phonograph publications and all sorts of reference material dealing with the history and development of sound recording that will provide background information for Favorite Pioneer Recording Artists

Please do not send me lists of records for sale. I am not interested in buying phonographs and records by mail and do not want "The Victor Book of the Opera." Do not submit material without being instructed by me. I will not pay for or return unsolicited items. If I do not reply I already have the material you offer. I am not a dealer and have nothing to sell. Address:

JIM WALSH

Box 476

Vinton, Va.  
tfx

Trend of the times is to glamorize the 1920 days of prohibition Dixieland and the Charleston. I have hundreds of Dixieland Jass Band, Charleston records. A little later on radio got its start and the record business fell flat on its face. The greatest musical stars like Ellington, Jelly Roll, Morton, Fats Waller, King Oliver and other great artists appeared on independent labels such as Harmony, Brunswick, Okeh, and many others. I have thousands of these rare items.

AL McREA, SR.

Box 182, Westville, New Jersey

### "F. R. P."

Famous Records of The Past  
2060 1st Ave., New York, N.Y.

Jack L. Caidin

Re-issues and re-recordings of rare and unusual phonograph records. Operatic, Theatrical, Political, Instrumental. The finest in quality and true reproduction. Ten inch long playing records \$3.98 each. Tax and postage prepaid.

SEND FOR FREE BULLETINS!

my65c

## MUSIC BOXES

Antique Swiss music boxes restored like new. All wheels, worm gears and pinions made right in my shop on NEW SPECIALLY DESIGNED MACHINERY. NO WORK "FARMED OUT" hence you are money in pocket when you get my low prices for guaranteed work.

Hundreds of music boxes of every conceivable type right in stock. Just ask for any specific item and I'm sure I will have it. Every item offered rebuilt like new, as to those that know, all machines need plenty of work on them to be in flawless condition.

Music box and bird cage bellows restored and birds refeathered.  
Barrington - GEORGE A. BIDDEN - Rhode Island

mond. Here are some pictures I made of that famous scenic spot. It's so far north you can read a newspaper without artificial illumination at 11:30 at night. We made side trips to Stratford-on-Avon and to Windsor Castle. Fourteen days were spent on the continent of Europe. It was a perfect trip. I'm so glad Flossie was able to fulfill her life's ambition.

We were impressed by the gallant way the people of Great Britain kept going so many years under great difficulties. They have an income tax of a straight 45 per cent and there's a 50 percent sales tax on virtually everything they buy. Yet they survived the horribly grim days of World War Two and the British Isles are now prospering. Tourists are able to buy things at a large discount by having them delivered to the boat. The material of this suit I am wearing was delivered to my boat. (We came home on the Queen Mary.) A suit of this material would cost at least \$200 over here.

And now I think I can best tell the story of our return from that wonderful trip by quoting the following "Notes and Comments By the Editor" from the August, 1954, issue of B. M. G. That's a magazine which has been published more than 50 years in England for banjo, mandolin and guitar players. It carried a long interview with Vess Ossman when he went to England and gave a command performance for his fellow banjo enthusiast, King Edward VII, in 1903.

The people who had the pleasure of meeting the Van Eps on their recent visit to this country will not disagree with me when I say that Mrs. Van Eps has probably made the greatest conquest of any visitor to these shores. Her charm, her grace, her obviously "pleased to meet you" attitude to all she met did much to cement the "Hands Across the Sea" spirit in the course of her all-too-short stay.

It will therefore come as a shock to many to hear that this gracious lady suddenly died from massive coronary occlusion on June 8, within an hour after returning to her home in Plainfield, N. J.

Every reader of B. M. G. will want to join with me in extending sincerest condolences and the deepest sympathy to Fred Van Eps in his loss.

On their return to America, Mr. and Mrs. Van Eps and Mrs. Shields were met by a handful of friends, including Mr. and Mrs. Magee, who had arranged a welcoming dinner at the Red Coach Inn at Gloster, N. J. During the dinner, following a toast, the guests of honor gave snatches of their experiences and impressions and Flossie and Fred made a speech in which she spoke most highly of the people she had met in England.

Mr. and Mrs. Longacre, who live near Pittsburgh, decided to drive the Van Epses home. Within an hour Flossie was dead. They arrived in Plainfield; Mrs. Van Eps alighted from the car and kissed the neighbors' children who ran out to welcome the returning travellers. Stepping into the house, she sat down and suffered the heart attack that brought immediate death.

Fred Van Eps, in a brief note received a day or so ago, tells me that although his wife had suffered from a heart ailment for some time, the shock of her passing has left him prostrate. The only consolation he can find is that, as his dearly beloved wife had to go before him, she has been saved the utter grief he is suffering had he passed away first.

Yes, that's the way it was. We went into our home. Flossie sat down, said, "Our trip was the most wonderful experience of my life, but it's good to be back"—and was dead within just a few minutes. It seems that her strength held together just long enough for her to take the trip she had dreamed of all her life. Then, when her ambition was accomplished, it suddenly gave way. And I'm sure you understand what I meant when I said my father and mother went the right way when they died within 12 days of each other back in 1926.

#### XII Van Eps Laboratory

Now, let's talk about something else. I have already mentioned my laboratory at my home near Plainfield, and if I don't do some explaining your HOBBIES readers will probably be scratching their heads, trying to figure out what sort of a business I'm in.

Back in 1940, I was still trying to perfect my new technique for playing the banjo but was uncertain whether to keep on experimenting with it or to go back to the old method. The result was, I swung back and forth like a pendulum and for a while I didn't play the banjo at all. I had always been interested in the technical processes of sound recording, and so, during this period when my banjo stood idle, I developed some devices that are the foundation of my successful business.

The pictures on this circular will give you a clear idea of what we make. One of our specialties is the Van Eps vacuum system for drawing the chip in disc sound recording. We make this for the big recording companies. The vacuum system, which consists of four bellows vacuum pump mounted on a base, (a slow speed motor driven by a V belt), prevents the tangling of the thread with the stylus. Thread tangling, I'm sure you know, is the most common cause of failure in disc recording. My apparatus is efficient and quiet and can be placed directly beneath the recording machine.

Then here's a photo of the Van Eps patented eccentric fixture which cuts the eccentric circle that actuates record changers. It includes an eccentric cam that grips the pin of the turntable and actuates the swinging arm carrying the advance-ball and stylus. A magnifier and lamp are included, and with this fixture it does not take more than 30 seconds to make a cut that adapts the record for use on automatic changers.

It isn't necessary for me to have a large number of workers to turn out my recording devices in adequate volume, but the business, as I have said, has proved very profitable. One of these days I'll be operating it from California.

Speaking of California. I have another plan on the fire. Not so long ago I received a phone call from a man in New York who identified himself as a nephew of Vess Ossman. He had what I think is a great idea—a plan for getting one of the big movie companies to make a feature film based on the history of the banjo with prominent attention paid

to the life story of Joe Sweeney, its inventor, who lived at Appomattox, Virginia. Where Lee surrendered to Grant. There could be also mention of Sweeney's brother, another skilled banjo player, who was attached to the staff of the Confederate General, "Jeb" Stuart. When I go to California in December, as I have been doing for years, I shall get in touch with some of the movie magnates and try to interest them in this scheme. A marker honoring Joe Sweeney has been placed at Appomattox, but he deserves more recognition than that.

#### XIII New Photography Method

One thing seems to lead to another, rambling along like this. You asked me to tell HOBBIES readers something about my method of—as you said—photographing nothing and making it come out something. For instance, taking a picture of a clear pane of glass and by careful attention to developing methods coming out with a finished print of intricate design and, often, of remarkable beauty. Well, the process is secret, and I don't think anybody else has done anything like it, but I'll tape record a description which I'll try to keep as non-technical as possible.

To begin with, it's not strictly a photographic process, for the reason that a camera lens is not used. It's a manufactured negative, starting with a piece of plain glass, 2½ inches by 4. The original idea was to make crystal negatives, with art effects like snow, frost on the window and what-have-you? I made a few of those and found that if you made one you made all. There was no variety. They were all alike. Then I got to floundering around and ran into a process that seemed to afford infinite variety. Finally, I got a method of making a rather remote form of crystallization that could be controlled. The results were astounding. The prints range from apparent photographs of the solar system to what appears to be luxuriant South American scenery. That's about all the detail I feel I can give, but I showed you some of the prints and you agreed they are really "out of this world." I think I can truthfully say nothing just like them had ever been seen before I hit on my secret process.

#### XIV New Recordings

Making records is far easier today than it was in 1897 when young Fred Van Eps first walked over to the Edison laboratory with two homemade cylinders as samples of his work, but a conscientious artist still will often make lots of "takes" before he achieves anything that satisfies him.

A few years ago, after I had perfected my new method of playing, I went back to recording. I issued an album which you remember, Jir, you reviewed in the April, 1952, issue of HOBBIES. The descriptive notes on the inside album cover were reproduced from your review in *Variety*. The records came out under the Five String Banjo label, and the recording was done on equipment designed

and built by me. The playing was done at Robert's home, with Rob serving as accompanist.

The album includes "Maple Leaf Rag," "Ragtime Oriole," "Smiler Rag," "Nola," "Dell Oro" and Moszowski's "Bolero," and it was quite successful. Right now I have plans for issuing another album of five-string banjo music and I'm giving you some test pressings of numbers that may appear in it. I call your special attention to one called "Cubist," recorded in Rob's home after several hours hard work. This is the sixth take. "Cubist" is an enormously difficult thing to play properly, but I believe this is the best record I have ever made.

You asked me the names of some of my favorites in the old recording days. Well, I like "Persiflage," which I made for Victor and other companies. I also like a Victor by the Van Eps Trio, "Oh, Susie, Behave." And I think one of the brightest and most sparkling things I recorded is an Indestructible cylinder which I played for you with my electrified cylinder machine. It has the odd title of "Powder Rag and Dope," and seems to be rather a hard record to find nowadays. Probably my biggest seller was the one called "Dixie Medley" on Edison discs and cylinders and a good many other brands. Edison used it as its "standard" banjo record—that is, the one that all banjo recordings were supposed to equal in skill of performance and naturalness of tone. I was amused by this excerpt from instructions to Edison dealers, which you showed me in the Edison house organ, *Diamond Points*, for May, 1917:

You should have a supply of No. 50195, "Dixie Medley" and "Infanta March." A dancing expert tells us that the Dixie Medley is the best one-step she ever heard. This was news to us. But the expert was right; we proved it. Moreover, this is a superb demonstration record. Van Eps plays the Dixie Medley for a well-known talking machine. Compare Van Eps's talking machine record with Van Eps' New Edison Re-Creation. We don't know anything deadlier in comparative demonstration.

No, I'm not going to say what brand of "talking machine record" the Edison writer was thinking about. I honestly don't know. "Dixie Medley" was called "Turkey in the Straw Medley" on Victor. I re-made it around 1920, after it had originally been recorded by Ossman. As I remember, Charlie Prince, the recording director for the old Columbia Phonograph Company, arranged that medley.

One of the most popular records the Trio ever made was Victor 17575, "Too Much Ginger and The Smiler Rag." They were both one-steps and they were played good and loud. I was amused when you showed me that description in the June, 1914, Victor supplement:

"A REAL DANCING NOVELTY. . . Here are two novelty selections, which can be used for dancing purposes if desired. They are simply tremendous in volume, and are just the thing for dancing on the porch or lawn, or in a large hall. If you play them in a small room you should use a half-tone needle or you are likely to break the windows!

"The players in this new combination are the best in their respective lines—the best banjoist, the best ragtime pianist and the best drummer in America!"

That was quite a compliment for Felix Arndt, Eddie King and Fred Van Eps!

In September we came through with two more rowdy one-steps on Victor record 17601. One side was "Chinese Picnic" and "Oriental Dance," and the other "The Notoriety Rag." The supplement remarked:

"To say that the two records by this organization of 'noise makers' which were listed in June have made a hit is putting it very mildly indeed, as the effort to supply the demand has in fact taxed the capacity of our record factory. Here are two more lively numbers, just as loud and in perfect time for one-stepping. They will be found ideal for open-air dancing, as they can be heard at almost any distance."

We gave the old "William Tell" warhorse a ragging in August, 1915, when the Trio's record of "I Wonder What Will William Tell" came out in one-step form. It was on 17799, backed with "Chicken Reel Comedy Medley" by the Six Brown Brothers Saxophone Sextet. Once more we were lively and loud—but all this time I still didn't like using drums and wanted to do what I eventually did—substitute a saxophone.

I have always been a strong believer in restricting the banjo to the type of music for which it's suited. To my way of thinking, the late Alfred A. Farland, my Plainfield neighbor who died May 5, 1954, at the age of 88, was a pathetic example of the banjoist who goes wrong. All his professional career Mr. Farland tried to adopt the banjo to types of classical music for which it was unfitted. When Vess Ossman was interviewed by B. M. G. more than 50 years ago he pointed out this fallacy of Farland's. I once paid Farland for a course of instruction and when he wanted me to play Hauser's "Cradle Song" I quit in disgust. It isn't the question of classical or otherwise, it's the type. There are plenty of rhythmic numbers that are effective in both classes.

Mr. Farland and I were friends and used to attend get-togethers of five-string banjoists. In his late years when he had trouble with his hands (he also became deaf) and couldn't keep playing, he was a ticket-taker at a theater. He had a great admiration for my wife—everybody admired Flossie—and he would always "pass" her in. The old gentleman was an impressive looking figure with a shock of snow white hair, but his house on East Second Street in Plainfield was the most abandoned appearing place in the city. It was never painted and the grass on the lawn was never cut. I used to hear Mr. Farland practicing on the banjo inside the house when he would have been far better occupied outside, getting some wholesome exercise by cutting the grass. Yet he certainly lived to an advanced age. It seems he made only one record—an Edison of "Carnival of Venice." I heard it for the first time when you played it for me, and it was obvious that Far-

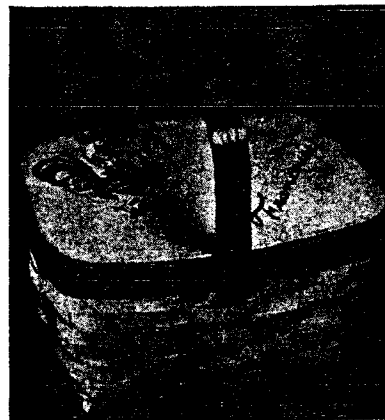
land's banjo was out of tune! . . . Speaking of banjoists, I was very sorry when Joe Morley, the best English player of his time, died back in 1937.

#### XV Random Reflections

Jim, I want to tell you I've been very much pleased by the warm love you so evidently have for your two beautiful cats, Roger and Gray, and the devotion they show you in return. One of my tests of a man is whether he cares for animals. If you didn't like animals I couldn't like you. I have never seen better cared for pets than black-and-gold Roger, and Gray, who lives up to his name, and I don't think I ever saw two cats whose sweetness and goodness made them more worthy of the best of everything.

My wife was extremely fond of animals. She was devoted to our Collie, dog, Nellie, and taught her to "sing." Flossie would say "pianissimo, Nellie," and Nellie would bark very softly. "Fortissimo!" would bring a loud outburst, Nellie actually understood, and still understands, a number of musical terms. Some people insisted she merely learned a routine and gradually barked louder as Flossie worked up from pianissimo to fortissimo. To disprove that, she would mix up the instructions, and Nellie would obey them in whatever order they were given.

I know a cat 25 years old, and I hope Roger and Gray will reach that fine old age. But I must tell you about a black cat owned by some friends of mine in England. We'll call him Tommy. My friends lived in one of the heavily bombed sections of England during World War Two, and the lady of the house got into the habit of listening for the bomb "alert." When it sounded she would pick



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Warren, R. I.

mye





Some of the members of the American Banjo Fraternity. Get-togethers are held three times a year at Lewistown, Pa.

BACK ROW: left End. 1 - Unidentified. 2 - Hugh Pilling. 3 - Jack Giddes. 4 - P. Cadwell. 5 - Alex Magee. 6 - John Copeland. 7 - Garland Love.

FRONT: 1 - Lloyd Longacre. 2 - Mason Lillie. 3 - Paul Jacqueline. 4 - Geo. Shields. 5 - Wm. Bowen. 6 - Van Eps. 7 - Geo. Gerhart. 8 - Tom Wrigley. 9 - Wm. McCutcheon. 10 - Cecil Boyd.

up Tommy and carry him in her arms to the community bomb center a short distance away. Then, when the raid was over they'd return home.

One day she was working in the kitchen, when Tommy began to act nervous—almost frantic. He kept wailing and pawing at her clothes. So she said: "Well, Tommy, I don't hear anything, but if you think the raiders are coming we'll go to the shelter." She picked him up and left the house. Five minutes later the bombers were over the place and scored a direct hit. The kitchen was smashed to bits, and if she had been there she would have been killed. I'm glad to say both Tommy and his mistress survived the war, and he is still the pride and joy of the home because of his life-saving feat.

How did Tommy know the bombers were coming? I wish I knew. Perhaps he had a sixth sense, as cats and dogs so often seem to have, and it warned him of danger. Perhaps he was able to hear sounds emitted by the planes that weren't audible to human ears. At any rate, he was a hero. I think animals have much

more intelligence than some people give them credit for. I can't be positive that they reason, but they certainly learn by association—just as you tell me Roger has learned to turn off the light by pressing a wall button. He evidently has seen you push that button, then noticed the room became dark, so he tried the same thing. But would that be reasoning or learning from association?

When I mentioned the automatic banjo did I tell you how it was the forerunner of the tenor banjo? The story might be interesting to your readers who are specially interested

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### MUSIC—MISCELLANEOUS

**THE OLD MUSIC HOUSE** Buys, Sells, trades, coin operated pianos, Reginas, hand organs, rolls. The largest collection in Middle West.—R. C. Lambert, Owner, Monticello, Iowa. d122511

**WILL PAY CASH** for Cylinder Phonographs and Records. Also Horn type phonographs and anything pertaining to early phonographs. Write.—Pollard, 4109 Soquel Dr., Soquel, Calif. je3614

**ARMSTRONG** Player Piano Co. has bellows cloth, tubing, leather. New 88 note rolls, \$1.00.—222 S. Vassar, Wichita, 3, Kansas. ap126111

**ILLUSTRATED SONG SLIDES.** Wanted popular or sentimental titles. Full sets preferred, but will consider partial sets. Will buy or pay for use.—John Ripley, 120 E. 2nd St., Topeka, Kansas. ap3084

**ASTONISHING** High-Fidelity reproduction possible on Edison Diamond Disc Re-creations. Enjoy recordings of another and by-gone era with modern equipment. New electronic tone arm to fit any phonograph motor or player capable of 80 R.P.M. speed. \$40.00 P.P. Money back guarantee. Edison reproducers electrified. \$15. Both completely wired to amplifier.—Clyde E. Haines, Box 1442, Reading, Pa. ap3449

**LEWIN RECORD PARADISE**, now offers the most Rare Collection of Original Operatic Gems, ever available. Send stamped envelope for lists.—6507 Hollywood Blvd., L. A. 28, Calif. ap1612

### VIOLINS FOR SALE

**OLD COLLECTION** imported by myself from Italy, 10 Violins, 2 Violas, Cello, several old French bows.—E. Adamson, R. 1. McAllen, Texas. ap1861

**VIOLINS:** Genuine old Masters: Casper Strnad, 1823; Ascoli Celani, 1850; Vincent Panormo, 1850 and Cello, Viennese Baronet Neuberg, over 100 yrs. old. All of these rare instruments can be bought for less than 1/2 of current market price.—H. G. Walker, P. O. Box 97, Bon Air, Virginia. ap1

### MUSIC BOX DISCS

**MIRA** music box discs, 18 1/2" \$3.; 15 1/2" \$2.50; 12" \$1.50; 9 1/4" \$1.00; 6 13/16" \$0.75. Plus postage and insurance. Send for lists. No Reginas.—Squires, 2328 Channing Way, Berkeley, California. ap1633

## CURRENT COLLECTORS' RECORDINGS

By ALLEN G. DEBUS

One night a few years ago Ralph Edward's television program, "This Is Your Life," brought into the homes of millions of Americans the almost unbelievable story of Lillian Roth. I am sure her triumph over alcoholism has been an inspiration to many, both through this television program and through her best selling autobiography, *I'll Cry Tomorrow*, (currently being published in paperback form) which has been made into a movie starring Susan Hayward.

Lillian Roth was one of the child stars of vaudeville. By the time she was in her teens she was starring in one musical review after the other. From the Keith Circuit she went to Earl Carroll's Vanities. From there to Ziegfeld's Follies, and on to Hollywood where she became one of the first sensations of the "Talkies."

Then, at the height of her career, she gave up show business for marriage. Although she was to return to Hollywood in the mid thirties, her addiction to alcohol was already beginning to ruin her personal life as well as her career. This story is chronicled in an unforgettable manner in her autobiography.

Hence it is that to many who saw her on "This Is Your Life" she was an unknown. I venture to say this is true for most of the younger record collectors, since, to the best of my knowledge, she never recorded in the twenties and the early thirties when she was at the height of her fame.

Lillian Roth is a singer whose name has most often been compared to that of Ethel Merman. Happy for collectors, she has recently made some recordings for Coral and Epic. The first

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**PHONOGRAPHIANA**—The most complete magazine for the record collector of old time popular, classical, or jazz whether disc or cylinder. Sample copy 25c.—Box 32, Kutztown, Penna. my3234

**NEW LISTS** now in preparation—400 operatics, Victor, Pathe-Freres, Brunswick, Opera Disc—800 popular, jazz and personality, many choice items—100 old hill-billy items—a few popular Columbia 7" with brass centers dating back 50 years or more—60 years of recorded music, all types—send name and address and state type of list wanted. I buy records and radio transcriptions, popular and jazz only.—William C. Love, HINDALE Drive, Nashville, Tenn. my32511

**RARE** Parlor Player Organ, over hundred rolls; also old parlor organ with tuned chimes; both original / Cylinder music box with organ, drum, bells, castanet. All cases beautifully refinished.—Casper Wagner, 5802 Garfield, Kansas City, Missouri. ap1082

**PIANOS** coin operated buy, sell or trade, expert repairing; also hand organs rolls for all types.—Dodge House Museum, 2208 West Chestnut, Dodge City, Kansas. ap126111

## FRED VAN EPS

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in banjos. An instrument came out called the "Encore" automatic banjo. It was more or less like the tenor banjo, with the four strings tuned in fifths—C, G, D, A,—and it was activated with a paper roll, perforated just like a player piano roll. It was run by a vacuum. They had little knobs to stop the strings and there were four little vacuum bows with steel picks on the ends that picked the strings. You could make a single stroke or a tremolo continuous strokes. When they were in order they sounded pretty good.

The first automatic banjo I ever heard demonstrated was at a concert in Chickering Hall—that's an old place long since gone—at 18th street and Fifth Avenue, New York. One of those things out of tune was the most god-awful things you ever heard in your life—they were terrible! Well, anyway, there's a player out in Venice, California, who's supposed to be the originator of the tenor banjo. He was called in to tune this automatic banjo. He was a violinist, but he thought that if he could tune a banjo in fifths the way he did a violin, in a week or two he could become a banjo player.

About that time there were a lot of mandolin players who came to New York from Chicago, looking for business, but they found there wasn't any demand for the mandolin. Everybody wanted the banjo. They stayed until their money gave out, then went back to Chicago and came back with banjos tuned in fifths. And that was the start of the tenor banjo, which is used as a rhythm instrument in orchestras. But it never was, and never will be, a solo instrument!

So much for that. You asked me if I listen to present-day popular music. Yes, I tune in "Hit Parade" programs and that sort of thing and listen as long as I can stand it, but I usually wind up turning the knob violently to shut the set off and muttering to myself. Popular music today undoubtedly is the worst in American history. When the disc jockeys play the so-called ten most popular songs of the week they select almost entirely the moronic junk picked by teen-agers who will fall for any new fad. This "rock and roll" and all that sort of rubbish is terrible beyond belief. In the old days music was for the whole family, but it was usually the grown-ups who did the buying. Nowadays it's the kids who bring home the records and tune in the radio and tv—and it's largely they who make eating in a restaurant a nightmare for a civilized person by dropping coins into juke boxes.

But if I keep talking in this vein, the younger set among HOBBIES readers will accuse me of being an old fogey—or, maybe, even a "square!"—and we don't want that to happen. I don't want to conclude our recorded interview on a note of bitterness and disillusionment. Life has been too good to me for that. So suppose, Jim, we bow ourselves off the stage

gracefully by quoting that paragraph you wrote about me in *Life* for September 5, 1955:

SIRS: "Strummin' Up a Banjo Boom" (*Life*, Aug. 15) should have mentioned the virtuoso most connoisseurs consider the greatest living master of the five-string instrument—Fred Van Eps of Plainfield, N. J. He made his first phonograph records at the age of 16 on Edison's wax cylinders, and is still going strong, playing and recording, at the age of 76. JIM WALSH, Vinton, Va.

Going strong! That's what I am doing and hope to be doing for many years to come—even up to the age of 108 and beyond! Regardless of whether I am in New Jersey or California or paying another visit to you and Roger and Gray here in Roanoke I'm going to keep on trying to make the most of every passing moment, for only in rightfully directed action can progress be made. And, as Thomas A. Edison used to say: "I'd rather wear out than rust out!"

## THE END

## CURRENT COLLECTOR'S RECORDINGS

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of these was issued a few years ago by Coral and the record is titled "I'll Cry Tomorrow" (Coral EC 81103). Besides the title song, the record includes three other songs closely identified with Lillian Roth: "Eadie Was A Lady," "Did You Ever See A Dream Walking," and "Please Tell Me When."

In connection with the current motion picture Epic has released a twelve inch long playing record that is truly a Lillian Roth cavalcade of hits:

Epic LN 3206 (also available on PG 9010) Lillian Roth:  
Love Thy Neighbor  
Ain't She Sweet  
Let's Fall In Love  
If I Could Be With You  
When The Red, Red Robin Comes  
Bob Bob Bobbin' Along  
Sing You Sinners  
Honey  
Goodv, Goody  
As Time Goes By  
Don't Take Your Love From Me  
Happiness Is A Thing Called Joe  
I'd Climb The Highest Mountain

HELEN KANE: In June, 1954, in this column I mentioned some of the recent recordings that had been made by Helen Kane for the MGM and Columbia labels. Since then she has again recorded for MGM, this time a record titled "Boop Boop a Doop Girl."

MGM X1164 (45 rpm extended play)  
Do Something  
When I Get You Alone Tonight  
That's My Weakness Now  
When My Sugar Walks Down The Street

For all collectors of the music of the late twenties and the early thirties, I am sure these recent records by Lillian Roth and Helen Kane will be of importance.

## OLD VEHICLES

## THE GAD-WHIP

By D. TUDOR HARRELL

At Caistor in Lincolnshire, England, there existed a custom on Palm Sunday, whereby a person representing the proprietor of the estate of Broughton came to the porch of Caistor Church while the first lesson was being read and cracked the Gad-Whip three times. He then folded it up neatly and returned to his pew until the reading of the second lesson.

He then approached the minister with the whip held upright. At the upper end was a purse holding 30 pieces of silver. He knelt before the

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## WANTED

WANTED AUTOMOTIVE ITEMS: Anything pertaining to the early automotive industry, all kinds of automotive trade publications, catalogs, instruction books, technical books, automobile hand books, pictures, framed or suitable for framing. Brass lights, oil or acetylene, bulb horns, acetylene generators, some accessories, emblems, name plates, hub caps, license plates, motor meters, old cars, trucks, bought anywhere, clothing, dusters, goggles, etc., or what have you.—B. J. Pollard, 14300 Prairie, Detroit 38, Mich. je 36311

WANTED TO BUY OR TRADE automobile radiator name plates.—Wallace Huffman, 610 South Webster, Kokomo, Indiana. ja124201

WANTED: Genuine stagecoach.—Wm. Gannon, Mabton, Washington. ap12654

OLD AUTO LAMPS, horns, books, old cars, etc., wanted.—D. D. Way, P. O. Box 372, San Mateo, California. ap6015

WANTED:—License plates; Automobile magazines; Old automobile; all before 1920. —Anthony Shuplenus, Newport, New Jersey. je3042

UP TO \$10.00 each paid for early license plates in good condition, more for 1st issues. —Linville Jewelry Store, Winterset, Iowa. au6276

WANTED: Old Automobile magazine "MOTOR" prior to 1925.—Paul N. Woehler, 572 Enright Ave., Cincinnati 5, Ohio. my3272

REWARD Wanted old time automobiles or parts of same regardless of condition. Especially interested in old Stutz or Mercers. \$25.00 Reward for discoveries, if such information results in a purchase by me.—F. W. Edwards, 839 Marsh Road, Menlo Park, California. ap1823

## AUTOMOBILIANA FOR SALE

COLLECTORS ITEM: 1920 Lincoln Motor Co. stock certificate, original Henry Leland issue. Also two 8x10 glossy photos of the Leland Lincoln, items are original not copies. While they last \$2.00.—Wylie S. Boley, 11707 Mendota, Detroit 4, Michigan. ap3046

## WANTED

Antique Automobilia: Brass Head and Side Lamps, Horns, etc. Also old prints, sheet music, posters pertaining to old autos.

## Toys:

Tin and iron automobiles, Iron horse drawn carriages, circus wagons, fire engines, etc. Also Bell Toys.

## W. S. McKELVY

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Pittsburgh 19,

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