

THE COLLECTOR'S GUIDE TO VICTOR RECORDS by Michael W. Sherman in collaboration with Kurt R. Nauck III. Revised Second Edition. 288 pages, 800 illustrations. Monarch Record Enterprises, Tutti, CA. 2010

Reviewed by Richard Green, Library and Archives Canada

Now I know we are all supposed to be happy readers, spending long fruitful hours in contented company with our iPads, Kobos, and Kindles, but, really, when you have a book as lovely as the new revised and expanded edition of *The Collector's Guide to Victor Records* in your hands, in hard cover for this reviewer, an e-book seems, well, kind of dull. Sort of like listening to an MP3 when you could have a warm sounding LP. But I guess I am just an analogue kind-of-guy. Which is fortunate because, when it comes to books about the pre-digital era of recording, in particular the record labels that dominated the 78-rpm decades, this book sets the standard. It is detailed, thorough, well-written, professional and a delight for anyone, or any collection, with an interest in, and passion for, 78-rpm discs. Indeed, anyone who is contemplating a research project on record labels from any era or any country should consult this book as a model. Michael W. Sherman, and his collaborator, long-time IASA member, Kurt Nauck are to be congratulated on a fine publication.

The first edition, published in 1995, established an approach to studying the operations of record companies through the documentation of the labels of the records themselves. The revised second edition maintains this method which was, and is, a perfect compliment to discographies and corporate histories. By examining the evolution of labels, and providing images, the authors link the discs to changes in the music industry and, in this case, the rise and progress of arguably the most important label in American recording history, the Victor Company. From its roots with Berliner Company in 1886, through the Victor Talking Machine Company, to RCA Victor and the end of the 78-rpm disc in 1958, plus the various incarnations and labels in-between, the changes in Victor labels, major, minor, and almost indecipherable are covered. By following the sequence of record labels, and the often subtle changes on the labels, it is possible, using this book, to accurately date the pressings of Victor recordings, establish probable recording dates, and document the changes in technology and industry priorities throughout the decades. Others, before and since, have used this approach, in whole or in part, but few have put it together, and presented it as beautifully as these authors.

The second edition doesn't provide much new textual information on the Victor Company's history. It does however have many modifications, refinements and improvements over the first edition. The book format is larger (7" x 10" instead of 6" x 9", 19 cm x 26 cm instead of 15 cm x 23). There are more pages (288 vs. 176). The images, over 800, take advantage of high resolution digital technology, and are now all in colour and are clearer and sharper. Combined with quality paper for the printing, the overall impact is superior and the image detail, for example, the early engraved Berliners, the fine details for the type-face used in the Batwing labels, and the patent information for various labels, is excellent. Measurements for disc and label size are provided in both imperial and metric. Anyone who has worked with 78s has to appreciate the fine eye that distinguished and described the minute details that differentiate many of these labels. This is truly a labour of love, or perhaps an obsession?

Sections on early Berliners, celebrity recordings, and the post Second World War recordings have been greatly expanded. The graphs detailing release dates are better laid out with the addition of colour adding to the ease of use. The section on specialty labels and other series has grown from twenty pages to ninety and provides much greater coverage of Foreign and Ethnic recordings (a plus for archives in other countries), Production and Marketing releases, and Broadcasting and Movie discs. The variety of labels depicted illustrates the range of activities undertaken by the Victor Company. The contribution of many collectors and researchers to these sections is acknowledged. The project has no doubt benefited from the thousands of discs that pass through Kurt Nauck's hands every year.

The book contains several very useful appendices including a look at some of Victor's printed materials (a possible research project in itself?), some summary tables, an annotated bibliography, footnotes (new for this edition), and an index (an essential for such a project). The Preface and Introduction provide an important discussion of the project's background, basic labels, recording dates, pressing dates, and concludes with some very insightful comments on the nature of collecting. As one of my research mentors used to say, "You won't know what the book is about unless you read the introduction," so read the introduction.

The *Collector's Guide*, with its superb history of the Victor labels, compliments the Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings <http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/>, currently being produced online at the University of California at Santa Barbara under the direction of IASA members Sam Brylawski and David Seubert, and the Library of Congress' National Jukebox <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/> guided by IASA's Gene DeAnna. The Victor Discography documents the recording events that are described on the Victor labels and the National Jukebox brings the recording sessions and the labels to life by adding the music. Sometimes archivists, librarians and discographers, in the quest for descriptive detail, forget the music. The introduction to *The Collector's Guide* quotes Victor discographer John Bolig as saying, *Whatever the label may say, the grooves speak louder*. John is a wise man and the authors of *The Collector's Guide* are even wiser by acknowledging the connection.

With the 2nd Edition, Michael W. Sherman and his collaborator, Kurt R. Nauck III, have set a new standard for discographic research in general and for record label research in particular that others must now aspire to. Hopefully his work will also serve as an inspiration for others undertaking various research projects. Maybe it will lead some to look through their collections to see if there is that special label that this book missed. I am sure the authors would welcome corrections and additions for that is what research is all about. So, if you have Victor 78s in your collection, are interested in the history of the recording industry, or are just looking for a good book, give your collection and yourself a real treat and purchase the 2nd edition of *The Collector's Guide to Victor Records*. You won't regret it.

The Collector's Guide to Victor Records can be ordered through Kurt Nauck at www.78rpm.com where you can also view some sample pages.