

Rare Bits

Collector Profile: Rainer E. Lotz



Welcome to a new feature for the newsletter. Our intention here is to expand on the entries offered in the membership directory, and also to highlight the important role private collectors play in ARSC. Rainer's name should be well known to many ARSC members. Simply put, he is one of the great scholars of 20th century recorded sound research, and when presented with the opportunity to write this column, he was one of the first to come to mind. From his home in Bonn, Germany, Rainer publishes prolifically (nearly 100 books and twice as many articles) and has contributed to countless reissues. Many of his discographies are available for free online (<http://www.lotz-verlag.de>) as well. He received an ARSC Lifetime Achievement Award in 1998.

How did you start collecting?

I have no affinity to astrology whatsoever, but they say that those born under the sign of Virgo are naturally born collectors. I can remember having started collecting things from a rather early age: caterpillars, stamps, or just anything odd that attracted my attention. But I was never just a case of nutty squirrel; rather I was

intensely interested to study caterpillars developing into butterflies, and I developed a desire to visit those exotic places which issued stamps, to meet the people and to learn their languages. Record collecting was added late in my teens, in 1955, when I was some 17 or 18 years of age. At that time I attended an all-boys public boarding school on an island in the German Sea. I found it difficult to chase (no, not collect) girls there, so collecting records was a third-best alternative. I have added other collecting habits since, and have given them up again. In a small way I still collect African hairdressers' signs and other primitive *art brut*, as well as modern art (mainly paintings). I do not collect gramophones and phonographs any more.

What is the approximate size and scope of your collection?

The "Rainer E. Lotz collection" does not include opera or classical music, and not any longer poetry or theatrical declamation (this part of the collection has found a new home at the German National Archive of Literature). On the other hand it is strong on Americana. I have always been fascinated by the spread of American musics around the globe, and the role African-American expatriates played from the very beginning. Also, I have a small but representative collection of American-recorded blues and jazz; what makes it special is that the discs were mostly pressed in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and Latin America—some on rather obscure labels.

Part of the collection was assembled under discographical aspects and covers an impressive assortment of obscure early record labels from around the world, including specimens of the majority of record labels pressed in Germany, and their iconographic variations.

My collection is particularly strong in German language personality, but also similar items from around the world, including many artists of Jewish origin who perished in the Holocaust or emigrated to the U.S. Lastly I have several small collections within the collection—for instance, recordings of historical interest, politics, campaign speeches, World Wars I and II propaganda.

Very last but not least, an assortment of ethnic material from around the world.

Paper and other material: Monographs, music journals, record catalogs, photos and postcards, discographical and biographical files, newspaper clippings and other ephemera, a collection of unusual, contemporary paper

sleeves for 78 rpm discs, and a collection of gramophone needle tins (~4500 different tins, plus paper and cardboard containers, and advertising material).

Recorded sound material: 78rpm discs, LPs, reel-to-reel tapes of broadcast and live concert material; also musicbox metal discs, piano rolls, cylinders, CDs, and other formats, including what is probably the world's largest collection of very early (1904-) pictorial phono postcards.

How is your collection organized and stored?

All 78rpm discs are housed in archival cardboard sleeves and are vertically stored in specially manufactured ergonomically optimized shelves, following instructions from my late friend, John R. T. Davies. The organization is old-fashioned: Different shelves according to topic—jazz from Chile here, cakewalks there, etc. Each part of the collection is organized alphabetically by artist and by label, and also by catalog number. All discs are digitally inventoried, but without shelf numbers. So I still have to rely on memory (or what is left of it) when retrieving discs from the shelves. The system is straightforward for my purposes, but obviously not suitable for larger collections, which should be organized by shelfnumber in the order of acquisition, or perhaps by label and issue number.

How does the practice of discography affect your collecting habits? Does it force you to acquire things you have no desire to listen to?

Oh yes, definitely. I consider my collection to be an archive rather than a desert island collection for daily listening pleasure. The very early sound documents in particular tend to be painful to the ears—with respect both to both the sound quality and to the musical content. But, boy, they are invaluable for research! And often extremely rare. At any rate, although my collection is small, it is sufficiently large not to permit me to listen again to each recording—even if only once—for what may hopefully remain of my life. And I still add to the collection.... What is more, I spend much of my time at the computer, writing. I cannot listen to music with any pleasure while doing so, as good music requires my full attention, whether it is the Beatles or Beethoven, John Cage or Callas, Huun Huur Tu or Cecil Taylor. As a consequence, the larger the collection becomes, the less time I spend listening. It's pathetic!

Describe one that got away.

A couple of years ago I received a phone call from a girl friend whom I had not seen for two decades. She remembered my record collecting habits and informed me that a young lady whom she knows had inherited a warehouse (her deceased father had been a shipping agent). While cleaning, the young lady had discovered a few crates of LP records, and would I be interested? I explained that my main interest was shellac 78s, but I would have a look anyway. We tried to arrange a meeting at a time suitable to all three of us but somehow our holidays, travels, and other obligations made this difficult, and I forgot about it. A few months later, a young local collector friend of mine told me that he had just bought a large collection from out of a warehouse, and for little money.

To cut a long story short: it was indeed that collection, and they were all 78s, 5,000 of them. It was a jazz collection that had obviously been assembled with great knowledge and great care. Fabulous rarities which I won't describe here or else I get the ulcers.

Labels on the crates revealed that the original owner was one Arthur Kinnear. Arthur Kinnear? This is the name listed in the acknowledgements of some wellknown jazz discographies, from Brian Rust to Horst H. Lange. It turned out that Kinnear was a member of the British diplomatic service, stationed at the Bonn embassy after the war. Apparently he was being transferred to a new post and had packed all his belonging into overseas containers. For unknown reasons the containers had never been shipped, and had been forgotten for some 20 years.

I suspect that more than half of the world's population today does not know that there was something like LPs before the CDs. My informant knew they were "old" records. What I myself had forgotten is the fact that I, an ARSC dinosaur, belong to that tiny minority among the living souls remembering that there had been a 78rpm recording format before the vinyl LPs. Lesson learned, though too late, as this collection got away.

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To view this interview in its entirety, please visit www.arsc-audio.org.