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The record industry: the growth of a mass medium

by PEKKA GRONOW

Common sense tells us that sound recording – that is, records and cassettes – is a mass medium just like newspapers, films or television. In industrialised countries, listening to records is just as much part of everyday life as reading the newspaper or listening to the radio. A Swedish survey made in 1976 (Anon. 1979, pp. 85–8) indicates that, on average, Swedish adults spent thirty-five minutes daily reading newspapers, thirty-three minutes listening to records or cassettes and one minute watching films. Watching films on television was not included, but neither was listening to records on the radio.

A glimpse at standard textbooks on mass communication makes us doubt our common sense. Records are seldom mentioned at all, and certainly not considered as a medium comparable to film or radio.

The problem is in the message. The message of records is usually music, and communications research does not know how to deal with music. But musicologists have been equally blind to music as mass communication, and, as a consequence, the relatively few studies on the record industry which are available usually fail to consider this aspect.

If records are a mass medium, as we suppose, we will want to know things about this medium that are already known about the other media. For instance, how large is the audience for records? How many homes have record or cassette players? How many records are sold annually? How much time is spent playing records? Many of these questions are difficult to answer even for the present, and almost impossible when we go further back in history. But I am going to suggest that the growth of *record sales* is a fairly good indicator of the influence of the medium.

Recording technology and the structure of the record industry have changed considerably during its hundred-year history – although many aspects have remained surprisingly similar since the beginning of the century. I am particularly interested in how these changes have influenced access to *recording technology*. Which companies, individuals and even countries have been able to make recordings at various times?

I am also interested in the recorded messages, the content of the

recordings. A full analysis is far beyond the scope of this study, but I shall attempt to show how the number of recordings issued can be used as an indicator of the variety of contents available and the general development of the medium.

The following, then, is an attempt to summarise the development of sound recording *as a mass medium*. In particular, I shall attempt to summarise all available information on the growth of record sales throughout the history of the medium. The other aspects mentioned above will be illustrated by examples, with an emphasis on the early years of the medium. The relationship between records and other media, in particular radio and film, will have to await further study.

Before the breakthrough

The world record market in the 1890s has many parallels with home video in the 1970s. Sound recording had been promised a great future many times since its invention in 1877. Edison's phonograph had been demonstrated all over the world in the early 1880s. It was used with varying success as an office dictating machine, a scientific instrument, a toy and a coin-slot amusement machine, but in the mid-1890s success was still around the corner.

Edison's phonograph played wax cylinders, and owners of the instruments could make home recordings, but pre-recorded cylinders could not yet be mass produced. Since coin-slot phonographs created a demand for recorded entertainment, Edison and his distributors had to start supplying pre-recorded cylinders, which were first produced individually, then by a primitive duplicating process which limited the number of copies available from a single recording to about 200. The recordings were mainly intended for coin-slot phonograph operators, but some may already have found their way into private homes.

Meanwhile, Emile Berliner had introduced the gramophone, which played mass-produced discs but could not be used to make recordings. Berliner gramophones and records began to be regularly obtainable around 1895. No statistics are available, but it seems that Berliner issued a few dozen discs annually, each selling a few hundred or at most a few thousand copies (see Gaisberg 1942, p. 44). Although the impact of the discs was limited at first, sound recordings were now being mass produced for home entertainment.

In 1896 the first phonograph models explicitly aimed at the home entertainment market were introduced by Edison and by Columbia. The Edison Home Phonograph, selling for \$40 and reduced to \$30 in 1897, was announced as a 'machine for the millions'. It did not reach the millions yet, but in 1899, 151,000 phonographs were made in the

United States, and there was a steady if limited supply of discs and pre-recorded cylinders (US Bureau of the Census 1975, p. 696). Statistics from other countries are not available, but by the turn of the century the new mass medium was already well established in England, France, Germany and Russia, and had even made some impact in countries such as India, Egypt and Japan.

From the turn of the century to the First World War

The record industry took off around the turn of the century. The establishment of the Gramophone Co. in the UK in 1898, Deutsche Grammophon in Germany in 1898, and Pathé Frères in France in 1897 marked the beginning of a new era. In the United States, legal complications curbed the development of the new industry in 1899–1901, but after 1902 the industry progressed rapidly. The Victor Talking Machine Co., founded on 3 October 1901, took over the Berliner interests. The Columbia Phonograph Company produced both discs and cylinders. Edison remained faithful to the cylinder, which could now be mass produced by a moulding process.

By the outbreak of the First World War, the industry was established worldwide, and many of its present characteristics were already evident at this time.

The record industry today consists of about ten large multi-national concerns, which produce about half of all records sold in the world, and thousands of smaller companies, which produce the other half. Several of today's leading record companies can trace their ancestry to companies that were founded before or around the turn of the century. In the USA the industry remained almost completely in the hands of Victor (today's RCA), Columbia (CBS) and Edison, into the mid-1910s. In Europe, competition was stronger and legal constraints fewer, but the British Gramophone Co., the German Lindström concern and the French Pathé company had very strong positions.

The leading companies owed a considerable part of their success to technological innovation. They were not just record companies, they had to produce complete systems of recording technology. For the consumer, they offered both recordings and the equipment to play them on (and a critical observer of the cabinet phonographs of the 1910s might say that records were a sideline to help the sale of furniture). For the industry itself they had to develop recording equipment, mastering processes and presses. It is not surprising that initially there were several competing systems of recording technology. Edison's cylinder and Berliner's disc were followed by two different types of vertical-cut disc (Pathé and Edison); and even some

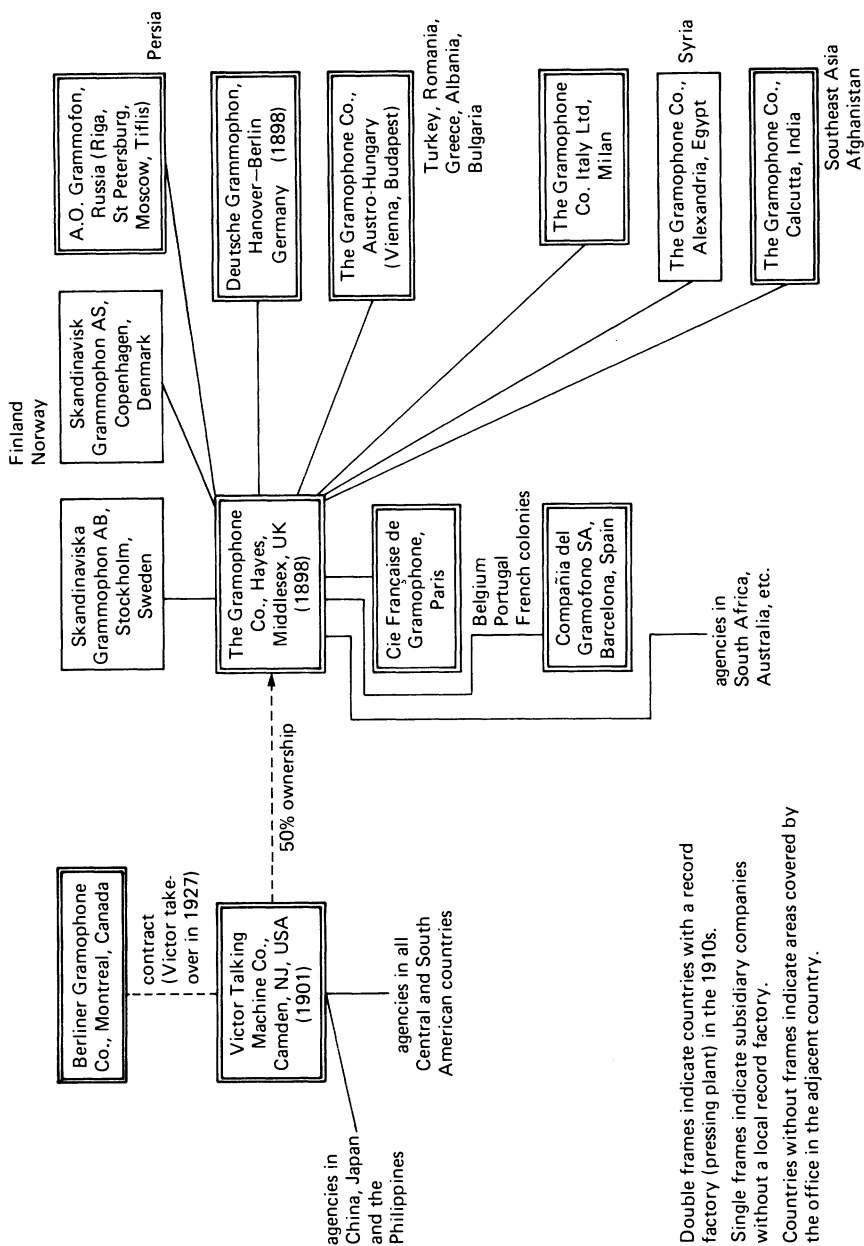
of the small companies attempted to introduce their own systems, including such oddities as the World record, which could only be played with a variable-speed World record player. Berliner's familiar lateral-cut disc became dominant in the 1910s, but the competitors did not give up until the late 1920s.

The leading companies set their goals internationally from the very beginning. Local factories were built up in the most important markets and, through networks of subsidiary companies and agencies, the companies covered practically the whole world. By 1910 there were hardly any countries in the world where the record industry had not established itself, and German and British gramophone companies fought just as bitterly as any other branch of industry in the years preceding the First World War.

Although exact figures are not available, it seems likely that the two biggest companies of this era were the Victor Talking Machine Co. of Camden, New Jersey, and the Gramophone Co. of Hayes, Middlesex, England. The latter was fifty per cent owned by the former, and in order to further their mutual interests, the companies agreed to divide the world between them. Victor operated in the Americas and the Far East, while Gramophone had the rest of the world. Figure 1 illustrates the international operations of these companies, which established the pattern for major companies in the record business.

Before the First World War, Victor concentrated manufacturing in the United States. Factories in South America and China were first opened in the 1920s, but recording engineers were sent on regular tours in these areas to record local artists in cooperation with the company's local agents. The recordings were then processed and pressed in the United States and shipped back to their countries of origin.

The Gramophone Company's operations were somewhat more decentralised. By 1910, the company had built local factories in Britain, Germany, Austro-Hungary, France, Spain, Italy, Russia and India, and the factories were operated by subsidiary companies registered in these countries. Local companies were also set up in other important markets such as Denmark and Sweden. Minor markets, such as Finland, Norway, Bulgaria, Portugal, etc., were supplied by local agents, but the entire operation was closely watched from Hayes. For instance, Otto Brandt, the Finnish agent of the Gramophone Co., obtained his recordings from Skandinavisk Grammophon AS in Copenhagen. The recordings were usually pressed at the Riga factory, as this offered favourable customs treatment, but contracts with Finnish recording artists were made by the Copenhagen office, subject to the approval of the headquarters. Operating in this fashion, the company



Double frames indicate countries with a record factory (pressing plant) in the 1910s.

Single frames indicate subsidiary companies without a local record factory.

Countries without frames indicate areas covered by the office in the adjacent country.

Figure 1. The Victor-Gramophone concern in the 1910s

could offer its products in every possible market place from London and Paris to the bazaars of Central Asia and the northern Caucasus.

A recording engineer on his way through the Caucasus mountains in 1910 could report that

In the Caucasus mountains the talker can be heard in every one of the multitudinous villages; the records are played unceasingly and are therefore soon worn out, causing a result which is not particularly pleasing to other than the Cossacks themselves who will never buy another record of the same title until one is actually broken. Even then they retain the pieces and in some cases decorate their huts with them. There is a fair amount of business done in the Caucasus; there is a population of seven millions excluding three million Russian people. The talking machine is the only means of amusement and therefore in demand. (Noble 1913, p. 65)

None of the competing firms could quite match the Victor–Gramophone empire, but they were not far behind. The German Lindström concern had factories in Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Russian Poland, Britain, Argentina and Brazil, and in the mid-1910s they were beginning operations in the United States. Pathé had factories in France, Belgium, Austro-Hungary, Russia and the United States. Edison concentrated production in the United States, but organised a fairly effective sales network in Europe. Columbia has been little studied and the company's history is difficult to follow because of frequent changes in ownership, but before the First World War the company's worldwide operations seem to have been directed mainly from New York and London.

As the demand for records and talking machines grew, new companies were eager to enter the market. In countries such as Germany, with a long tradition in the manufacture of musical instruments, clockwork machines and the like, there soon sprang up small companies producing gramophones or gramophone parts. Record production was not as simple. In the United States, Columbia and Victor controlled the main disc-recording patents until the mid-1910s, and would-be competitors were relegated to the marginal fields of cylinders or vertical-cut discs. In Europe, the basic patents seem to have expired at the beginning of this century, and German manufacturers were soon offering complete recording and pressing installations for interested businesses. New record companies sprang up in England, Germany, Russia, Italy and even Turkey, Egypt and Japan; and in 1910, the Russian trade paper *Grammofonny Mir* wrote disdainfully about a certain Josele Grinschpur, who was pirating the recordings of other companies in a three-press factory set up in his apartment in Odessa. However, Grinschpur must have been a talented mechanic; ten years later, the first attempt to set up a pressing plant in

Sweden failed miserably when the new technology proved too difficult to handle (Anon 1910; Englund 1967).

The Swedish factory ended in the hands of the Lindström concern. The same thing happened to many German independent companies around 1910. But there was an alternative way to independent production which required far less investment. Most major companies seem to have accepted custom recording and pressing orders, and many music dealers and other small entrepreneurs used this opportunity. Liliedahl (n.d.), for instance, lists twelve such labels in Sweden alone in the period before 1918. Most of these companies were satisfied with recordings made by the major company, reissued on their private label, but there were also original recordings, with performers ranging from individual cabaret artists to the Swedish Salvation Army. Custom pressing explains the existence, even in the period before World War I, of numerous small labels which could not possibly have had their own studios and pressing plants.

By the war, then, the record industry had already conquered most of the globe. But recording and pressing technology was rare outside the main industrialised countries, and the total number of record companies in the world was very limited.

How large was the record market? As can be expected, there is pitifully little information available. Tim Brooks (1977) estimates total US record (cylinder and disc) sales in 1900 at about 3 million copies. In 1921, the value of US record sales was \$106 million, representing approximately 140 million records. If we use data on phonograph production (US Bureau of the Census 1975, p. 696) as a guide:

345,000 in 1909
514,000 in 1914
2,230,000 in 1919

we can assume slower growth until the war years and a sharp rise afterwards. As a guess, we might put annual US record sales in the early 1910s as at least 30 million records.

Volklov-Lannit estimates Russian record sales as 20 million copies in 1915 (1964, p. 58). A rough estimate gives German record production (including exports) as 18 million copies in 1907. As official statistics give German record exports in that year as 6 million, the estimate may be fairly close to the mark, leaving local sales at 10–12 million. The French and British record markets must also have been close to 10 million copies, although no figures are available.

In several countries without local pressing plants, the record market can be estimated from import statistics. The sources and methods used are explained in the Appendix. For instance, Argentina imported

880,000 records in 1909 and 1,750,000 in 1910. In 1913, the year in which local pressing started in Argentina, imports were 2,690,000, but thereafter imports declined. Sweden imported about 150,000 records in 1907 and 300,000 in 1913. The Danish and Norwegian markets were around 100,000 each in the early 1910s. The Netherlands imported about 250,000 records from Germany alone in 1910, so the total market may have been as much as double that figure. India imported 600,000 records in 1907; the local factory which opened soon afterwards had an annual capacity of around 1 million. The figures quoted include many uncertainties, but they do give some indication of the world record market in the 1910s.

Another less direct indicator of the record market is the number of new records issued annually. Although exact figures are difficult to come by, discographers have given us several methods by which new releases can be estimated, and we know, for instance, that the Gramophone Co. alone issued about 200,000 titles in the period extending from 1898 to 1920. If this figure appears unexpectedly large, it must be remembered that average sales were low. Reports of Caruso's recordings selling millions of copies must be taken with a grain of salt, although it seems quite likely that some records did sell hundreds of thousands. However, record companies seem to have been quite satisfied with sales of a few thousand copies, and in order to open up new markets, sales of a few hundred may have been quite acceptable. Table 1 shows the Gramophone Company's sales and numbers of new releases in Scandinavia from 1899 to 1925. In the early years, the company had an almost total monopoly of the market; at the end of the period it was still the market leader but, even at its peak, the total Scandinavian market must have been below one million copies. The large number of releases seems to have been motivated by a clear awareness of existing musico-social groups. The industry's strategy was based on the production of recordings to suit the tastes of all conceivable consumer groups. National and ethnic traditions were all taken into account, so that by the early 1910s, Icelandic, Estonian, Welsh and Breton record buyers, the ethnic minorities of the Russian Empire, the twenty largest immigrant groups in the United States and the most important ethnic groups of the Indian subcontinent were all supplied by recordings of their own musical traditions.

Within Western countries, internal social stratification had also to be taken into account. Classical and popular music was frequently issued in separate numerical series, and classical recordings were naturally more expensive. Only traditional European folk music is almost completely missing from the catalogues; its main audience was still too poor to be considered potential record buyers.

Table 1. *The Gramophone Co. in Scandinavia, 1899–1925*

	Recordings made	Record sales (wholesale, £)		
		Copenhagen	Stockholm	total
1899	100			
1900	8			
1901	5			
1902	11			
1903	360			
1904	820	5,207	9,600	14,807
1905	480	8,897	8,328	17,225
1906	580	9,606	11,102	20,708
1907	780	10,580	13,374	23,954
1908	630	10,457	11,821	22,278
1909	780	10,055	11,516	21,571
1910	770	14,382	15,531	29,913
1911	830	17,320	19,891	37,211
1912	1,130	19,523	20,953	40,476
1913	1,250	21,166	19,593	40,759
1914	700	17,976	12,712	30,688
1915	750	26,428	17,293	43,721
1916	540	27,178	16,922	44,100
1917	20	18,095	8,904	26,999
1918	60	34,575	20,469	55,044
1919	1,090	58,274	36,506	94,780
1920	560	(30,024)*	(23,870)*	(53,894)*
1921	250			
1922	390			
1923	480			
1924	410			
1925	250			

*Six-month period, 1 July to 31 December 1920.

Notes. Recordings made are titles (sides) recorded; early recordings were single-sided, later issues double-sided (two titles per disc). More than 14,000 titles were recorded during this period in Scandinavia; the above figures include 5,300 Swedish, 4,800 Danish, 2,350 Norwegian, 750 Finnish and a handful of Icelandic titles, as well as about a thousand 'Pan-Scandinavian' (usually instrumental) items. In addition to Scandinavian recordings, the Gramophone Co. also sold other, international recordings in Scandinavia, and these are included in the sales figures. Record sales refer to twelve-month periods from 1 July to 30 June. The Copenhagen branch includes Norway and Finland in addition to Denmark.

Sources: Anon 1921; Liliedahl 1977.

In all categories, record company advertising relied heavily on the popularity that the performers had already gained from their stage appearances. Recording artists were billed as stars of the Metropolitan Opera, the Alhambra of Paris, or as court singers of the Emir of Buhara. But by the 1910s another strategy was also becoming apparent. In countries such as the United States, Germany and England, with strong music publishers, record companies were already using relatively anonymous studio singers and orchestras to produce assembly-line recordings of new songs. In this respect, too, the subsequent development of the industry was already predictable before the First World War.

Rise and fall: between the wars

In the United States, the record industry expanded rapidly after the First World War. Growth was so rapid that by 1922 the boom was already over, and in the mid-1920s radio caused a further decline. But it was only relative: throughout the twenties, annual US record sales remained above 100 million copies, and the late 1920s saw another turn upwards. In impoverished Europe, the industry took several years to recover, but by 1926 business was definitively expanding: 1929 was a boom year everywhere. The industry was well established in Europe, Asia and the Americas, but now it also expanded to Africa south of the Sahara. Table 2 summarises available statistics from this period. Although the number of countries included is small, we can make less accurate estimates for many other countries.

In Europe, even such small countries as Finland, Norway and Ireland sold about a million records each in 1929. Sweden sold 3 million, the Netherlands probably as many, and Spain and Italy can hardly have sold less. Germany sold nearly 30 million, the UK close to 50 million records in 1929, and France must have been between 10 and 20 million, if not more. In Latin America, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Cuba each imported close to a million records, mostly from the US, and Argentina and Brazil must have had considerably bigger markets. In Asia, the Indonesian market was nearly 2 million in 1929; the Indian and Chinese markets must have been bigger, and Japan may have been close to 10 million. Malaya, Turkey and Egypt sold around a million records each (Gronow 1981; Schulz-Köhn 1940; US, UK and German export figures).

These figures indicate that, in North America and Western Europe, records were now within the reach of the average person. We might estimate that between one-third and one-half of all households had a record player. The portable wind-up gramophones of the late 1920s

Table 2. World record sales, 1920-45 (millions of units sold - for USA, \$ value given, in millions)

USA												
\$	units	UK	Germany	Sweden	Denmark	Norway	Finland	Ireland	Switzerland	S. Africa	Colombia	Indonesia
1920												
1921	106	140		0.5	0.3		0.0			0.2		
1922	92			0.3	0.3		0.0			0.2		
1923	79			0.2	0.4		0.0			0.2	0.1	
1924	68			0.2	0.4		0.0	0.1		0.5	0.1	
1925	59	15		0.3	0.4		0.0	0.3		0.8	0.2	
1926	70		18	0.3	0.4		0.0	0.4		1.2	0.4	
1927	70		19	0.5	0.3		0.0	0.4	0.7	1.7	0.6	
1928	73		20	1.0	0.3		0.1	0.5	1.0	2.0	0.8	
1929	75	33		2.1	0.4		1.2	0.9	1.2	2.0	1.2	1.5
1930	46	100		3.0	0.5	0.7	1.2	1.1	1.9	2.3	1.0	1.9
1931	18		59	2.4	0.6	0.7	0.3	1.2	2.0	1.6	0.4	1.2
1932	11		11	1.6	0.6	0.4	0.1	1.2	1.5	1.1	0.1	0.8
1933	6		10	1.8	0.6	0.3	0.1	1.1	1.1	0.7	0.1	0.5
1934	7		7	1.2	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.0	0.5
1935	9	25	6	0.9	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.6	0.3	1.2	0.1	0.4
1936	11		3	0.8	0.6		0.1	0.6		1.5	0.3	
1937	13		5	0.9	0.5		0.2	0.5		1.9	0.4	
1938	26		8	1.2			0.3			2.4	0.5	
1939	44		9	1.4						1.9		
1940	48			1.3								
1941	51											
1942	55											
1943	66											
1944	66											
1945	109											

Sources

USA. Dollar sales from RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America); unit sales estimated on the basis of retail prices.

UK. Production from industrial statistics, minus exports plus imports.

Germany. Production from Schulz-Köhn 1940, minus exports plus imports.

For other countries. Figures are estimates based on the comparison of imports (not always available for records only) with the exports of Germany, France, the UK and the USA. Local production should be added to the Swedish figures (details not available), but it seems to have been relatively insignificant until the late 1930s. Norway gained local pressing facilities in 1935, Denmark and Ireland in 1937, Finland in 1938, and the series are cut at that point. The development of imports in Switzerland also suggests the existence of local pressing facilities in the late 1930s, but there is no direct evidence on this.

were certainly not beyond the resources of the average worker. In third world countries, per capita sales were naturally lower, and the ownership of gramophones was restricted to a minority, but annual sales of a million or more were enough to support several record companies, a considerable output of new releases and perhaps even a local factory.

However, the boom years of the late 1920s were followed by a depression that was even deeper in the record business than in the general economy. Sound film and radio replaced records as a fashionable form of entertainment, and by the mid-thirties, record production had declined from the level of 1929 to, for example, one-tenth in the USA and one-sixth in Germany. In the boom years there had been room for everyone, the small and the big. Major companies had continued to produce a full range of recordings and equipment, and they were also responsible for the major technical innovation of the period: electrical recording in 1925. Smaller companies had to specialise, and they usually restricted themselves to the production of popular music. Smaller countries such as Finland and Norway still had no local pressing facilities, and consequently had to depend on the agencies of the major companies. The depression caused a series of bankruptcies and mergers. In the USA there were only three active companies by the mid-1930s, and in Europe the situation was almost the same. Electric & Musical Industries (EMI) swallowed Columbia, Gramophone, Lindström, Pathé and a number of smaller companies, its only serious competitors being Telefunken and Decca. Apart from them, only marginal local companies, such as Swedish Sonora, Polish Syrena, German Tempo, etc., survived the depression.

After 1936, business picked up again. In Europe this led to the establishment of pressing plants in smaller countries, such as Denmark, Finland and Ireland, encouraging local production. Unfortunately this destroys the usefulness of import statistics as a source of information on record sales!

Information on the sales of individual recordings and on the number of releases in this period remains difficult to come by. Murrells (1974) clearly overestimates the number of million-selling records, although there is undeniable evidence of *some* recordings selling over a million copies in the late 1920s and again in the late 1930s in the USA. A top seller in England or Germany must have sold a few hundred thousand (see Batten 1956, p. 130), in Australia about 40,000, in Finland 30,000. Figures from the Victor and Columbia archives show that records aimed at minority audiences frequently sold less than a thousand (Gronow 1982B; Wolfe 1978; Cohen 1971, 1975).

The number and variety of new releases in the late 1920s was tremendous. Columbia alone could issue more than a thousand new discs in the USA in 1929, and the total number of releases in that country must have been over 10,000. In Finland, where slightly over a million records were sold in 1929, about 450 new domestic records were issued in that year (Strömmer and Haapanen 1981). But by the mid-thirties, both the number and variety of releases declined considerably.

On the international level, the large multinational companies still dominated throughout this period, but two special cases must be mentioned. In Japan, the record industry was gradually nationalised in the 1930s, and the half dozen local companies produced perhaps 15 million records annually (Schulz-Köln 1940). In the Soviet Union, the industry was nationalised in 1918. Production in the old plants continued throughout the 1920s, but judging by the number of new releases it must have been relatively small. In the 1930s, the industry was revitalised. By the late 1930s the repertory had almost the same variety as in the 1910s, and production was considerably higher, perhaps as high as 55 million copies in 1940 (Anon. 1974).

The post-war expansion

At the end of the Second World War, the United States was by a wide margin the leading record-producing country in the world. The upward trend of the late 1930s continued uninterrupted through the war years, despite material shortages and industrial disputes, and after the war the sales curve took a sharper turn upward. In 1945, US record sales were valued at \$109 million, in 1980, \$3,682 million. In terms of unit sales, the growth is slightly less impressive. Exact figures for 1945 are not available, but \$109 million must have meant around 200 million records, all 78 rpm singles. Sales in 1980 were 650 million, mainly LPs and cassettes.

The rest of the world took some years to catch up with the United States. The immediate post-war years was a period of austerity in Europe, and in many countries record sales did not reach 1929 levels until the late 1950s. But sales have continued to grow, and in terms of per capita sales, the UK, France and the Federal Republic of Germany were by 1980 on the same level as the United States (see Table 3).

In South and East Europe and in South America, per capita sales are lower, but the 56 million records sold annually in Brazil or 200 million sold annually in the USSR are foundations for strong record industries. Statistical information from other areas is scarce, but one thing is clear. Records are now important almost everywhere. Only some of the

Table 3. World record sales, 1945-80, including pre-recorded tape (millions of units sold - for USA, \$ value also given, in millions)

The five leading countries						
	USA		UK	FRG	France	Japan
	\$	units				
1980	3,682	649.0	170.4	199.1	143.9	219.8
1979	3,676	683.0	187.0	202.4	144.4	208.0
1978	4,131	762.2	195.9	206.1	157.0	203.4
1977	3,500	698.2	231.6	161.1	148.1	218.7
1976	2,737	591.6	223.7	139.3	121.0	184.8
1975	2,391	533.3	202.1	127.0	120.8	162.9
1974	2,200	539.9	198.4	120.9	102.9	164.6
1973	2,016	616.0	177.9	109.1	90.9	159.0
1972	1,924		148.3	107.1	89.4	
1971	1,744		126.0	86.9	76.5	171.3
1970	1,660		114.0	87.0	<u>62.3</u>	<u>153.9</u>
1969	1,586		106.4	76.6	60.1	105.4
1968	1,358		98.9	68.9	52.6	96.3
1967	1,173		90.2	57.5	48.7	80.7
1966	959		84.9	47.5	43.3	75.6
1965	862		93.8	49.2	47.5	72.7
1964	758		101.2	43.0	47.6	
1963	698		85.5	42.3	43.2	45.9
1962	687		77.5	47.4	40.1	
1961	640		76.4		34.1	
1960	600		72.7		27.6	
1959	603		66.7			
1958	511		71.4	53.4		
1957	460		78.4	57.3		
1956	377		66.5	56.0		
1955	277		59.9	40.0		
1954	213			31.0		
1953	219			25.0		
1952	214			17.0		
1951	199			12.5		
1950	189			7.6		
1949	173			4.0		
1948	189					
1947	224					
1946	218					
1945	109					

Table 3 (cont.)

Western Europe												
	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	Greece	Italy	Netherlands	Norway	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland
1980	12.1	22.3	<u>8.9</u>	4.9	8.8	44.2	45.5	7.5	9.3	45.9	15.1	14.2
1979	11.9	25.8	12.6	4.4	8.8	50.1	53.0	7.7	9.1		15.0	13.2
1978	13.8	25.6	<u>11.7</u>	4.3	6.8	43.7	55.8	8.1	5.7	43.8	15.6	13.3
1977	9.4	24.0	<u>9.5</u>	5.1	6.1	41.8	48.3	7.2	4.7	<u>25.8</u>	17.7	12.8
1976	8.6	20.2	7.5	4.6	6.1	39.4	33.4	5.3	4.7	24.0	17.4	
1975	7.8	19.2	6.1	4.0	4.5	31.5	27.7	4.7		20.1	16.3	9.6
1974	7.2	18.1	5.6	3.0	4.2	28.0	24.2	4.0		19.9	13.9	11.1
1973	5.7	17.2	5.0	3.0	4.6	27.6	26.8	3.7		19.3	12.3	
1972	4.9	15.1	4.6	2.6	4.6	28.2	25.2	3.3			11.5	
1971	4.8	12.9	4.6	2.1	4.4	33.2	24.3	3.2		15.7	10.8	
1970	4.0	12.4	<u>4.4</u>	1.3	6.0	<u>31.0</u>	15.3	2.9		14.5	10.2	
1969	3.6		3.8	0.9	4.3			2.5	2.4	11.0	9.7	
1968	3.7		3.5	0.7		39.8		2.8	1.9	12.9	8.8	
1967	3.4	10.0	3.2	0.8		37.4		2.8	2.0	9.2	8.2	
1966	3.2		3.1	0.8		32.0		2.6			6.2	
1965	2.8	7.2		0.9		28.5		2.5			(4)	
1964				1.0								
1963			2.8	1.0	1.7	25.0						
1962				0.9	1.9							
1961				1.1	2.0							
1960				1.0								
1959				0.9								
1958												
1957												
1956												
1955												
1954												
1953												
1952												
1951												
1950												
1949												
1948												
1947												
1946												
1945												

Sources and Notes – See p. 70.

Table 3 (cont.)

	Eastern Europe (records manufactured)						North America		
	Czechoslovakia	GDR	Hungary	Poland	Romania	USSR	Yugoslavia	Canada	Mexico
1980								84.5	82.6
1979								94.5	79.1
1978	10.4	18.0	5.3	6.3	5.3	204.0		94.0	
1977	10.6		5.7		5.1	202.3	15.7	85.3	67.4
1976	10.4		4.0	7.7	5.0	198.3	13.7	82.4	
1975	10.2		3.4	7.0		196.7	14.6	74.4	
1974	10.1		3.2	7.3		196.2	14.3	74.9	33.4
1973	10.3		3.2	5.8		187.0	13.2		32.5
1972	10.1		3.2	5.4		183.6	16.0	53.1	
1971	10.0		3.0	5.1		175.3	15.9	45.3	
1970	9.6		3.0	6.1		172.6	14.2	<u>43.5</u>	21.9
1969	9.0		3.6	5.4		193.8	11.7	41.3	21.9
1968	7.8		3.3	4.9		196.9	9.8	39.1	17.2
1967	7.2		3.4	4.9		189.2	10.0	47.2	14.8
1966	7.1		2.7	6.1		163.7	11	43.8	
1965	8.3		2.3	7.5		140.7	8	36.4	
1964	7.6		2.4	6.3		132.7	7	28.9	
1963			1.2				3		
1962									
1961									
1960									
1959									
1958									
1957									
1956									
1955									
1954									
1953									
1952									
1951									
1950									
1949									
1948									
1947									
1946									
1945									

Table 3 (cont.)

	South America					Oceania			Africa		
	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Ecuador	Peru	Venezuela	Uruguay	Australia	New Zealand	South Africa	Kenya
1980	22.3	56.0		12.7		13.3	0.6		8.5		2.8
1979	21.3	46.7					0.7				2.7
1978		58.0					0.8	38.3		11.2	
1977	16.8						0.7	46.5	6.7	13.1	
1976	19.9						0.7	43.1			
1975											
1974									6.9	11.4	
1973										10.2	
1972											
1971		20.3							3.2		
1970		16.6							4.1	7.5	
1969	18.5	16.1	2.3					18.2	3.5	7.8	
1968	13.7	13.6	2.0						3.3	6.7	
1967	10.2		1.8						3.6	5.9	
1966	10.5		1.7						3.1	5.8	
1965	9.2	6.9							2.8	5.5	
1964											
1963						1.7					
1962											
1961									5.7		
1960											
1959											
1958											
1957											
1956											
1955											
1954											
1953											
1952											
1951											
1950											
1949											
1948											
1947											
1946											
1945											

Sources and Notes – See p. 70.

Notes:

The completeness of the figures given varies somewhat. In many countries, direct imports, sales by small record companies not belonging to IFPI, etc., are not included, but the sources do not usually specify this.

A horizontal line (—) indicates a probable change in the definition of the figures quoted.

One record counts as one unit (LPs as well as singles).

Sources:

Figures for 1970–1980 are from the IFPI (International Federation of Phonogram and Videogram Producers), for the earlier years from *Billboard*, with the following exceptions.

Eastern Europe: these are not genuine sales figures but production figures (records and cassettes manufactured) from UN industrial statistics and *Billboard*. However, in these countries most records sold are locally manufactured; for some sales figures from recent years, see *Billboard*.

France before 1970: Ministry of Culture (production, not sales)

Finland: Finnish branch of IFPI.

Germany before 1960: Blaukopf 1977, pp. 26–27; 1949–58: production figures.

UK: Harker 1980, p. 226

Japan: estimated sales, based on production

Canada 1964–7: production; 1968–9: record sales (tape not included)

USA: RIAA

poorest African countries still remain untouched by recordings, but Nigeria and Kenya already produce more records than Denmark and Finland did ten years ago. Fringe areas, such as Greenland, Fiji or the smallest Caribbean countries, have their own record companies; in Bali, village gamelan orchestras study multi-track recording techniques.

Technology has played a part in this development. The introduction of microgroove records in 1948 did not mean very much at first: it more or less perfected the technology of the 78 rpm era. But the introduction of magnetic tape in recording studios, to replace the cumbersome wax masters, put recording technology in everybody's hands. Records could now be made almost everywhere – local radio stations, basement studios, homes – just as long as a pressing company was available to produce the discs for sale. The introduction of cassettes and cartridges in the late 1960s removed even this obstacle. It not only increased the number of people who could afford to buy a record-playing instrument. It made the duplication of recordings again as simple as in the cylinder days. In Asia and the Arab countries, in particular, this revolutionised the record industry. In many countries the multi-nationals practically disappeared from the scene, and the record market was flooded with cheap imports from South Korea, Hong

Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, often unauthorised copies of recordings produced by major companies.

At the same time, the number of record companies has grown rapidly, and the leading major companies have changed their strategies somewhat. This development had already started in the United States in the 1940s. In the mid-1930s, there had been only three active record companies in the country. New companies began to appear in the late 1930s, and by 1950 there were already several hundred record companies. The same trend has been apparent elsewhere, more or less strongly, depending on the size of the record market; and the main exceptions now are the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, many of which have only one, centralised, record company. The ten biggest international companies still produce almost half of all records sold in the world, but their policies have changed. They no longer attempt to penetrate every possible market by producing a complete range of music. They have more or less willingly given up such specialised fields as the music of ethnic minorities, experimental music and, with the exception of the safest, best-known artists, all folk music, jazz and religious music – in fact most minority idioms. Instead, they concentrate on popular music, the internationally known classical repertory, and a small selection of recordings of other types, mainly by artists who have already become known on smaller labels.

Naturally, the policy varies somewhat from company to company, and it is further complicated by the willingness of many major companies to distribute the products of other companies.

Also, the major companies no longer attempt to produce a full range of audio products, from records to gramophones and accessories. Instead, they have become involved in other fields of entertainment and mass communications and in some cases have become parts of large industrial conglomerates whose interests can range from electronics to parking lots.

World record sales increased dramatically from 1960 to 1980. How this is reflected in the number of new releases remains to be studied. In the United States, the number of new releases by RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) members has remained almost the same for many years, but nobody knows how many non-RIAA companies produce – often for local or specialised markets. Murrells (1978) lists 102 million-selling records in 1958 and 139 in 1979. At one end of the scale, then, a general increase in record sales has not meant an increase in variety but simply bigger sales for best-selling records.

In any case, the growth of the record industry in the main record-producing countries seems to have stopped in the 1980s.

Explanation has been sought in the general economic recession, the influence of private copying, and competition from other media. But perhaps records, as a mass medium, have now reached the saturation point which newspapers, radio and television had already attained earlier. Just as people are unlikely to read many more newspapers next year than today, they perhaps already buy as many records as they need. Records, like newspapers, radio and television, have an established role in our communications systems, a role that may be somewhat changed but hardly radically altered by the eventual growth of other new media.

Summary

The record industry had already established itself internationally before the First World War. Although annual sales were still low, the industry's corporate structure and mode of operations showed a surprising number of similarities with those of today.

Another expansion took place in the late 1920s. At this time records were so popular in industrialised countries that, had the trend continued, in another five or ten years it might have reached saturation point, where most households would have had record players. Instead, the depression came, and radio and sound film took the place of records. It took the record industry almost thirty years to regain its position.

The third expansion, which may now be over, started in the sixties. In industrialised countries, record sales grew rapidly, and Western Europe caught up with the USA in terms of per capita sales. With the exception of the poorest third world countries, records and cassettes became an important medium everywhere, even in fringe areas with few developed mass media.

The role of recordings is further emphasised by the development of a symbiotic relationship between radio and the record industry, whereby radio in most countries has become dependent on records for a large part of its programme time. Through radio, records are accessible even to people who cannot afford to buy them.

Today it is impossible to think of almost any type of music without considering the role of recordings. I have often heard children say 'That was a nice record', when speaking of a live performance. Records and music are becoming almost synonymous.

Appendix: a note on sources

The standard history of sound recording and the record industry is still, despite its many inaccuracies, Read and Welch 1976. For the period before 1914, see also Chew 1981 and Koenigsberg 1969. Gronow 1982A is a discussion of available primary sources and the problems related to their use.

The IFPI (International Federation of Phonogram and Videogram Producers) has been collecting statistics on record sales from its national branches since 1970, but for some countries the information is still incomplete. *Billboard*, the US record industry weekly, has published sales figures in its annual International Buyer's Guide special issue since the 1960s. *Billboard's* figures seem to be mainly from the same sources as IFPI's, but they also are incomplete.

Studies on the economic history of the industry are few. The main sources are still Krebs 1925 and Schulz-Köhn 1940. Until very recently, records were usually not included in the industrial or cultural statistics of any country. Consequently, foreign trade statistics are the main source for the economic development of the industry. In many cases, records are lumped together with gramophones or other commodities in customs classifications. However, by comparing the export figures of the main record-producing countries with import figures of various countries it is possible to reconstruct the record imports of many countries. In countries without local pressing facilities, imports may be roughly estimated to equal sales. For a discussion of the problems involved in this method, see Gronow 1981 and n.d., and notes to Tables 2 and 3. The main statistical publications used are listed in the bibliography.

Readers interested in recent developments should also consult the international commodity trade and commodity production statistics published by the United Nations. Although these figures must be taken with caution, they are particularly useful as estimates of the influence of sound recordings in third world countries. The export figures of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea are a good starting point.

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Dirección general de estadística de la nación. *Anuario del comercio exterior de la República Argentina* (records listed beginning 1908, local pressing started 1913)

Colombia

Departamento de contraloría. *Anuario estadístico. Comercio exterior* (records 1922–)

Denmark

Danmarks statistik. Danmarks vareindførsel og -udførsel (records 1911–)

Finland

Suomen virallinen tilasto. Ulkomaankauppa (records and gramophones combined 1919–34, records 1935–)

France

Direction générale des douanes. *Tableau général du commerce et de la navigation* (records and gramophones 1910–28, records 1929–)

Germany

Statistisches Reichsamts. *Monatliche Nachweise über dem auswärtigen Handel Deutschlands* (records 1906–14, 1922–)

Indonesia (Dutch East Indies)

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Norway

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United States of America

US Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States* (records and gramophones 1910–14, dollar value of 'records and accessories' 1915–21, number of records 1922–)

(The above list includes the main record-exporting countries and those countries without local record production that are known to have published relevant statistics. The foreign trade statistics of countries which relied mainly on local production, such as Italy, Spain, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, etc., are of little interest here.)