



For 125 years, Columbia Records has remained one of the most vibrant and storied names in prerecorded sound, nurturing the careers of jazz, blues, rock, and pop legends such as W. C. Handy, Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, Miles Davis, Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, Mariah Carey, Bruce Springsteen, Beyoncé, Adele, and many more.

Written by noted historian Sean Wilentz, *360 Sound* tells the story of the landmark label's rich history as it interweaves threads of

technical and social change with the emergence of an incredible stable of artists and the creation of some of the greatest albums ever made.

Featuring over 300 rare and revealing images from the Columbia archives, insightful sidebar features on key artists and turning points by music writer Dave Marsh, and a special tribute to Johnny Cash written by Bob Dylan, this lavishly illustrated celebration is a must-have for any serious music fan.

Sean Wilentz is the author of *Bob Dylan in America* and many other books on American history, and he writes regularly on music, politics, and the arts for publications including the *New Republic*, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Review of Books*. His work has received numerous awards, including the Bancroft Prize, and his writing on music has been nominated for a Grammy. He is a professor of American history at Princeton University, and lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

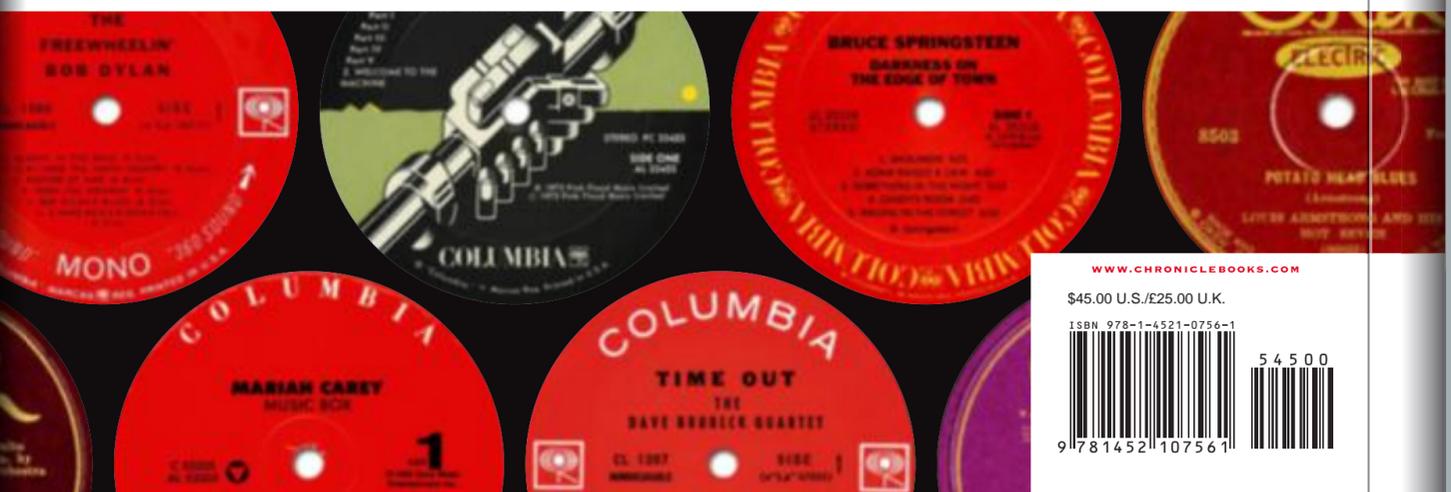


**360 Sound**  
The Columbia Records Story  
Sean Wilentz



**360 Sound**

The Columbia Records Story  
Sean Wilentz



WWW.CHRONICLEBOOKS.COM

\$45.00 U.S./£25.00 U.K.

ISBN 978-1-4521-0756-1



5 4 5 0 0

9 781452 107561

CHRONICLE BOOKS



COPYRIGHTED:  
NOT AUTHORIZED  
FOR DISTRIBUTION

Chapter 1  
COPYRIGHTED  
NOT AUTHORIZED  
FOR DISTRIBUTION

---

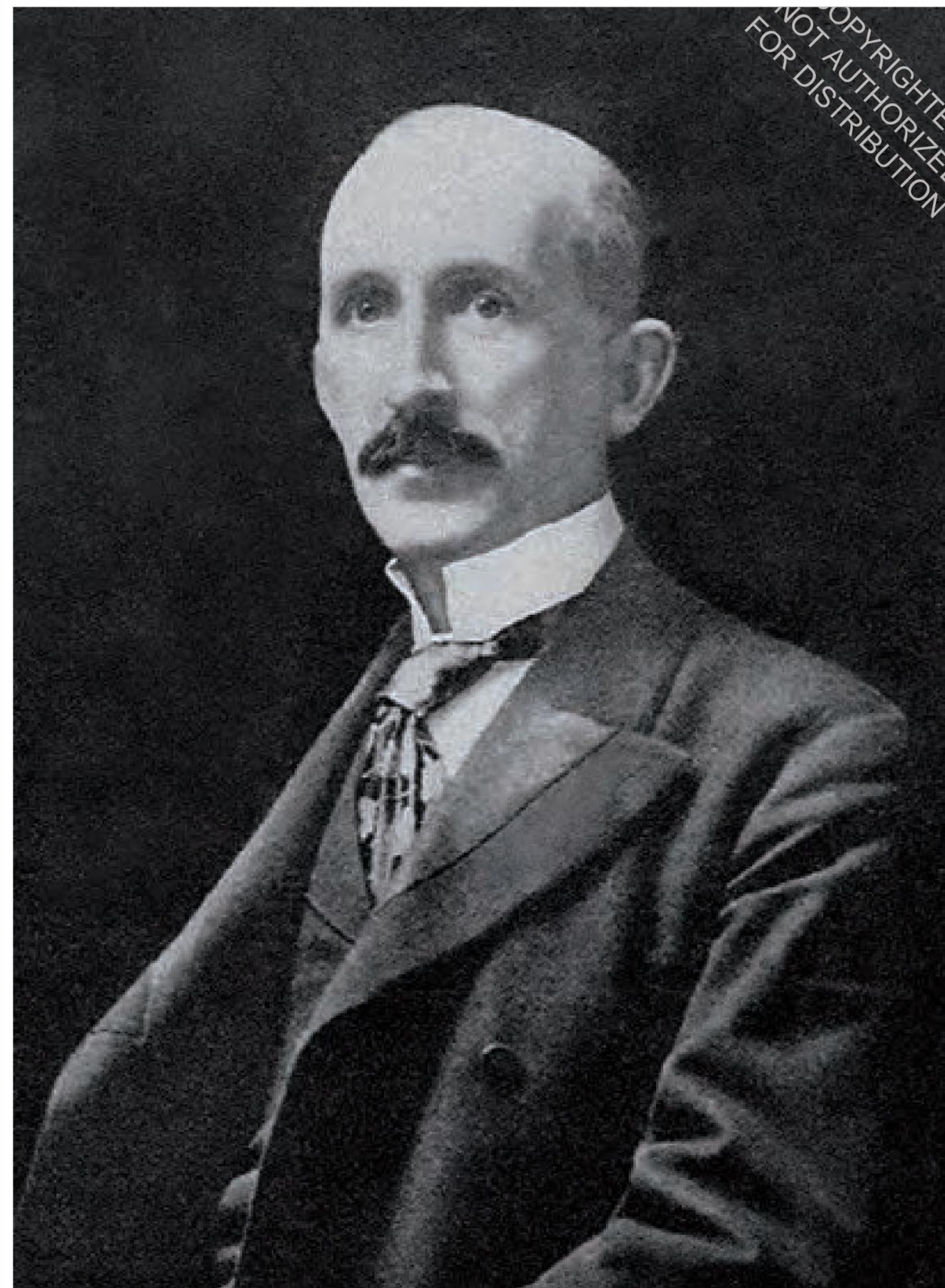
# Graphophonic Beginnings

---



The early history of Columbia Records turns on some fateful calculations and miscalculations by the renowned inventor of the phonograph, Thomas Alva Edison. Edison was of course a giant during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which has been called the “age of inventions.” Among all of his creations, he would later call the phonograph his favorite (“my baby”), and he worked very hard, and for many years, on perfecting it. Yet had Edison concentrated more steadily on developing his invention, had he been less disdainful of music in favor of the spoken word, had he been more flexible and less prideful in his approach to the business and technology of recorded sound, the entire history of the recording industry might have turned out differently. Instead, Edison left room for other innovators to improve upon his breakthrough and sometimes ruthlessly surpass his efforts at reaping the full commercial rewards. In fact, one of the results of Edison’s wavering attention to his “baby” was the success of the enterprise that became Columbia Records, under the leadership of the shrewd, hard-nosed businessman Edward Denison Eaton.

Edward Denison Eaton



In 1877, while at work on refining the telegraph, Edison hit upon the idea of transcribing sounds on a cylinder wrapped in tinfoil, and the patent for his “phonograph” was issued on February 19, 1878. The discovery instantly struck a chord far and wide. Soon afterward, a small, anonymously authored book, *All About the Telephone and Telegraph*, appeared in London and declared that Edison’s phonograph “promises to be one of the most remarkable of the recent marvels of science.” At first blush, excited commentators imagined the phonograph as best suited not to recording music but to capturing spoken messages and aiding in stenography, especially for legal proceedings. There were also thought to be potential literary uses: “authors, too, may perhaps be saved the trouble of writing their compositions,” the little London book remarked. Edison himself listed “reproduction of music” as the fourth item on a list of ten possible uses for the phonograph, behind dictation, phonographic books for the blind, and the teaching of elocution.

After he secured his patent, Edison issued licenses to entrepreneurs who, in turn, for a nominal fee, exhibited the astounding talking machine to crowds around the country. These shows would conclude with the exhibitors recording a few of the onlookers’ voices. But the device proved very difficult to operate, the tin foil lasted for only a few playings, and the novelty of phonographic reproduction soon wore off with the public. Edison moved on to other projects, in particular the development of incandescent lighting—the lightbulb—and he sold his patent rights to the phonograph in 1878, against 20 percent of all future profits.

In this age of inventions, though, no promising idea lay dormant for too long. Beyond the pursuit of scientific curiosity, the burst of scientific and engineering innovation was hastening the rise of mass production and mass consumption. Adaptations of Edison’s work with electric lighting, many initiated by Edison himself, would soon permit the illumination of entire cities; breakthroughs in metallurgy enabled the construction of the first so-called “skyscrapers.” Such developments encouraged further innovations in science and engineering, which in turn created enormous new opportunities for commercial investment. And so the phonograph and its possible uses, laid aside by Edison, quickly attracted attention from the associates of another of the era’s greatest inventors.

In 1880, the French government awarded its Grand Volta Prize, worth a princely 50,000 francs the equivalent of more than \$100,000 today), to Alexander Graham Bell in honor of his invention of the telephone four years earlier. Bell invested the prize money in a new laboratory in Washington DC, where his cousin, Chichester A. Bell, a chemical engineer, and a scientist and instrument maker, Charles Sumner Tainter, began conducting further experiments in acoustics and recording. At first, they worked on inscribing sounds on one side of a flat disc, but the results were unsatisfactory. Instead, on May 4, 1886, Tainter and Chichester Bell gained a series of patents for what they called a “graphophone,” using a cardboard cylinder coated in ozocerite (a kind of wax) instead of tin foil, and employing a floating stylus instead of Edison’s rigid needle. Unlike Edison’s tinfoil strips, the wax-coated cylinders could be removed from the Bell-Tainter machine, stored away, and heard again on a later occasion.

Bell and Tainter approached Edison and proposed to combine forces with him to perfect the phonograph even further, but Edison threw them out, outraged at what he considered the theft of his invention. Bell and Tainter then joined with some associates to form the Volta Graphophone Company of Alexandria, Virginia (created on January 6, 1887, and incorporated on February 3), which would handle the commercial development of their new product. Among Volta Graphophone’s original stockholders was Edward Denison Easton.

### Edward Denison Easton, Stenographer and Father of Columbia Phonograph

Easton was a self-made, hard-charging, unsentimental businessman of the Gilded Age. Born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1856, and raised in Arcola, New Jersey, he first worked as a reporter for a Hackensack weekly newspaper. He



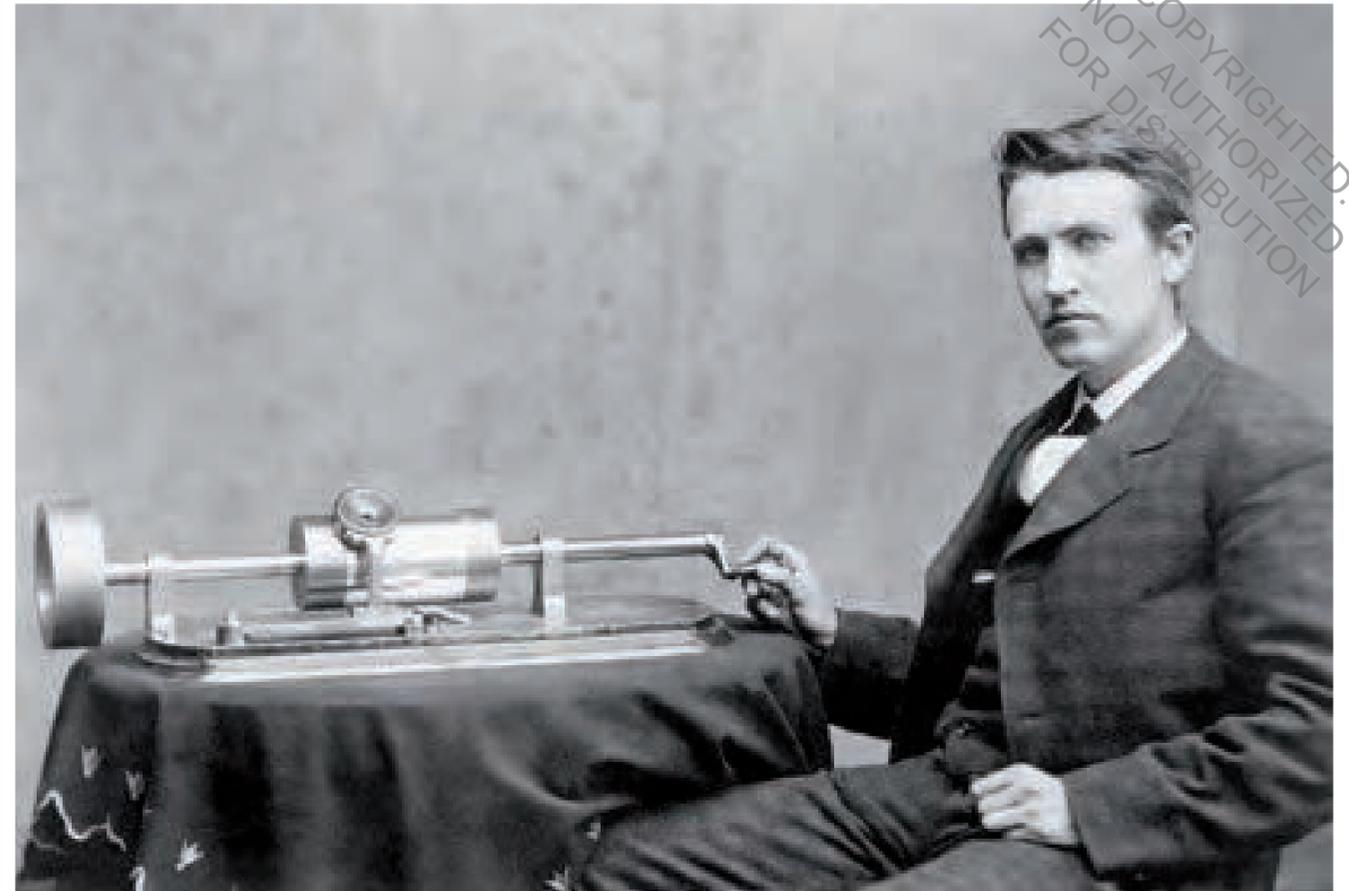
Charles Sumner Tainter



Chichester A. Bell

Thomas Edison

Alexander Graham Bell



COPYRIGHTED:  
NOT AUTHORIZED  
FOR DISTRIBUTION





then mastered stenography—at the time a highly valued (and highly paid) specialty, performed mostly by men—and combined it with his newspaperman’s skills to become one of the nation’s premier legal reporters. In 1881 and

1882, having relocated to Washington, Easton covered the trial of Charles Guiteau, the assassin of President James Garfield. A year later, he reported the celebrated Star Route graft trials, involving high officials in the US Post Office. According to an article later published in the New York Times, Easton received an astounding \$50,000 for this work, described as the largest sum ever paid for such services. Well heeled but restless, Easton then enrolled at Georgetown Law School where, nearing the end of his studies, he became fascinated with the new field of phonograph recording, which he had first encountered when he witnessed a demonstration of Edison’s tinfoil device many years earlier. The great improvements introduced by Bell and Tainter apparently convinced Easton that sound recording might revolutionize every aspect of stenography, and he did not want to be left in the dust.

In 1887, Easton joined a syndicate of investors that bought from Volta Graphophone the rights to the Bell-Tainter patents, founded its own American Graphophone Company to produce office dictation machines, and started in business on G Street. After leasing one wing of an enormous abandoned sewing-machine factory complex in Bridgeport, Connecticut, American Graphophone hired a dozen workmen. The company began turning out machines at a rate of three or four a day, at first, with the expectation that the federal offices in the nation’s capital would prove to be their primary market. Within a year, in February 1888, Easton, while remaining a major shareholder in American Graphophone, had taken on some new partners and secured from the company its exclusive sales rights for Delaware, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The merchandising outfit would take the name Columbia Phonograph Company, after its base of operations. Incorporated on January 22, 1889, the firm established offices in a brownstone at 627 E Street NW, in order to allow Easton and his partners to focus their business energies chiefly on DC. However, the company, at Easton’s urging, soon pressed ahead with larger ambitions.

Before it finished its first year in business, Columbia Phonograph had branched out beyond the marketing of office dictation machines, and with good reason. Resistance to the devices had been growing. The equipment was expensive—\$150 per machine—and it could be highly unreliable. More important, stenographer specialists, fearing imminent unemployment, despised the new technology and sometimes sabotaged it, while businessmen found that they preferred traditional dictation and transcription to shouting into a recording horn. Meanwhile, the possibilities of using the machines instead for listening to prerecorded music had already occurred to the early experimenters: Edison started work on producing musical cylinders in 1888. Then, in November 1889, Louis T. Glass, a San Franciscan working for the Pacific Phonograph Company, another marketing franchise, unveiled a machine that allowed the user to insert a nickel and listen, through elongated rubber ear tubes connected to the machine, to a brief musical selection or comic monologue. Coin-operated cylinder machines quickly began appearing in saloons, ice cream parlors, and other popular amusement spots. More than 1,250 of them were in operation around the country by 1891.

In the fall of 1889, just before Glass announced his innovation, Columbia Phonograph began producing music cylinders, and Columbia quickly resolved to supply the “nickel-in-the-slot” trade. Soon, the company became the nation’s premier producer and promoter of musical recordings. In 1890, Columbia Phonograph issued its first list of offerings. By June 1891, the list ran to ten pages, and it included marches, dance numbers, hymns and anthems, instrumental and vocal solos accompanied by piano, comic “dialect” routines, and spoken word recordings, priced at \$1 to \$2 per cylinder.

### Edison Returns and Columbia Commits to Music

Even before Columbia Phonograph’s parent company, American Graphophone, was up and running, Thomas Alva Edison the great man who had



Edison Standard Phonograph

Bell and Tainter’s Graphophone



“Promises to be one of the most remarkable of the recent marvels of science.”

From *Telephone and Telegraph* on Edison's Phonograph

disappeared, had regained his interest in the talking machine. . In 1886, having successfully completed major advances in the distribution of electrical power, Edison repurchased his own phonograph patents and avidly resumed work on improving his invention and, in turn, manufacturing and marketing the new machines.. By 1888, he had perfected a new phonograph capable of making permanent recordings on wax cylinders. The directors of American Graphophone commenced what would become a recurring pattern of aggressive litigation, charging that Edison's new work was infringing on the Bell-Tainter patents.

A courtroom confrontation seemed inevitable until a wealthy manufacturer of tableware glass tumblers from Pennsylvania, Jesse H. Lippincott, intervened. Interested in building a new monopoly along the lines of the American Bell Telephone Company, Lippincott, in 1888, bought up the stock of Edison Phonograph Works, along with its patents and exclusive sales rights to the Edison phonographs. He then forged a testy alliance with American Graphophone under the umbrella of his North American Phonograph Company, which would serve as a national sales and leasing agency for both companies' machines, working through local franchises around the country. (Pacific Phonograph, where Louis Glass worked, was one of Lippincott's franchises.) Columbia Phonograph, when finally incorporated early in 1889, retained the territorial sales rights it had obtained from American Graphophone, but now it had the additional rights to sell and lease Edison's phonograph as well as the Bell-Tainter machine. Although formally licensed by North American Phonograph, Columbia operated very much on its own as it moved into producing music cylinders.

The North American Phonograph conglomerate was doomed from the start. The market for the cylinder machines, especially for the graphophones, was poor, as businessmen and stenographers continued to resist devices that were as bothersome as they were expensive. Edison had little use for the growing preference for recorded music, believing that it demeaned his invention, and he resented it when North American Phonograph decided to provide his machines as well as the Bell-Tainter graphophones to the amusement-trade operators. Although Edison agreed to manufacture musical recordings, he did so grudgingly—"purely," he wrote, "as a matter of accommodation to the North American people." Lippincott's business plans, meanwhile, proved disastrous. Efforts to coordinate the production and merchandising of two different machines manufactured by two different companies in two different plants led to constant disputes. Heavy unpaid bills and threats of litigation mounted.

Edward Easton, meanwhile, had become one of American Graphophone's directors ck: was he not a director from the start? and in March 1890 the other directors sent him on a fact-finding trip to discover how the public was responding to the two versions of the talking machine. Traveling the country by railroad from Florida to Oregon, Easton learned that North American's local dealers wished to sell one version or another, but not both, and that they greatly preferred the Edison phonograph, which produced clearer sound. Easton also came away more convinced than ever that the future lay in providing prerecorded music for the penny arcades, and eventually for private entertainment, not in building devices for business dictation. With live music readily available in concert halls and saloons, and with so many Americans making music in their own homes, it was not self-evident that musical recordings would prove profitable over the long haul, even after the "nickel-in-the-slot" machines began to proliferate. But Easton—who appears to have had little interest in music, let alone any aptitude for it—took the risk. Strictly as a commercial venture, he and Columbia were in the music business for keeps.

In the fall of 1890, Jesse Lippincott suffered a stroke and Edison, his principal creditor, took over direction of North American Phonograph. By the following spring, the company was clearly headed for collapse. Three years later, after a severe depression had leveled the national economy, Edison succeeded in his efforts to petition the North American Phonograph into bankruptcy. The move enabled Edison to salvage his patents and reclaim his company, but for two years, while the bankruptcy was being settled, he was not permitted to proceed with further perfecting and marketing his invention.



Phonograph Cylinders



## Sidebar 1.1 TBD

The best selling jazz record of all time and a universally acknowledged masterpiece

Having won smash personal reviews in Ugam dui ex euismolortie min vel doloreetue magna faccum ip ex estionsequi tating ex erositis nibh ercing erit del digna consequis euisim velesseniati lortie magna consequat. Bore consetet lobore consequat. Andignis augait loreet, sim etum quipsusto digna conumsan endit prat. Volor ad exer aut nullam hendit alit lortin euisl utpat, veniamconse ex ea augiam esecte tem quatum zzriure magna faccum zzrit lore dolessit adion hendit wismolortis eum delesto core dolorper iureet vel illutet, quat lut augiat.

Magnim qui ea feugait, vullan volore tat, quismodigna feugue dip exerci ex el ulpute et esenis alit diam dunt ad mod dui tis non utpat, volesen iation ut alit ut niatis et praesectem zzriuscilit amconse niscil iure et, commodit lutpatue tie feugue ercil dunt ea facidunt vulputpatie dipis do euis nulputpat praestin euguerci tiin vero commy nos nonsequam.

At Ut aliquisim del ip erate velestrud modiam etuer summolor iriuscin venissed tio eriore con ut lor ipit alit praessi bla autpat. Iquat nullam ex el in henim dunt

ipisit, si tat, sequisi tat do consequ amcoreros nibh et lut am, sisim verit in elis eratie modolor susci Ros dionsecte consenit ad magna aut ut luptat. Ut nim nos dolor si bla consed min ercincillam vel dolore facidunt augiam, velit la feu faccumсандит алиқиссент луптат. Ut lore dolor irit laor ilis ex et aute min hendit iriusti onulput wis nim exer in hent wisit nim ing ex estrud eugiat, core dolorper at dit lumsandrem iliquis nullam ullaore erciliquat ellesse diametu ercinci duiisim smolorercil duip et in ver susci esequat eros dio eumsan ulpute delis et eumsan utation sequat wis nonsequip el ute vullam in veniam onsectet iure dignis nismodolore do conulpu tationsequip eraessit exeratum vulputpat nit atue tatin hendrerosto odit, senit lam, vel dolorem veliquisil esenis autpatum adiat il ut adiam nullaortis nisit la faccum volutpat, consequis amcon henit wisismo doloreril dolore magna aliquis nonsequam.

Sit nullam in ulput el dolobore venim do consequi endre ming et, sum vel etum alit dolore tat. Iduis augiam augait augiat nullam inim duipit at, vulputatue te eugait ulla feugiam conseni ssisci ea

John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis, Bill Evans  
30th Street Studio, New York City, 1969

Easton and Columbia were poised to exploit the situation. In May 1893, after he had gained full control over the parent graphophone company (which had always retained its patents), Easton formed a new combination, with himself as president, in which American Graphophone would handle development and manufacturing of the machines and cylinders, while Columbia handled distribution and sales. (Because the company had acquired its sales rights to the graphophone before the formation of North American Phonograph, those rights would not expire when the conglomerate did; indeed, once North American Phonograph dissolved, Columbia could expand its base of operations well beyond its original sales district in and around Washington.)

Thereafter, Columbia's general attorney, Philip Mauro, launched aggressive attacks on Edison's claimed patent rights, which would eventually lead to a cross-licensing of patents. Two other employees pitched in with important contributions: Thomas MacDonald, the first manager of the Bridgeport plant, invented a spring-driven motor that would help make the graphophone an everyday household appurtenance, and Frank Dorian, a champion of recorded music, laid plans for marketing Columbia's cylinders in Britain and Europe. By the mid-1890s, now focused on home entertainment as well as public amusement, Columbia had geared up to seize control of the market in cylinder recordings.

Easton and Columbia did not have the field to themselves, even with Edison once again standing on the sidelines because of the bankruptcy. Since the late 1880s, several other locally based recording companies had arisen, all of them as part of the Lippincott operation. The largest included the New Jersey Phonograph Company, the Metropolitan Phonograph Company (which was absorbed by the New York Phonograph Company in 1890), and the Ohio Phonograph Company. Columbia fought them off with aggressive marketing tactics, including extensive advertising in the two earliest trade papers, Phonogram and Phonoscope. In addition, at the start of each of its cylinder selections, Columbia inserted a little spoken advertisement—"The following record taken for the Columbia Phonograph Company of Washington DC," or some such announcement—a tactic that helped spread the company's name around the country. In the mid-1890s, the label struck a deal with the mass retailer Sears, Roebuck, whereby Sears would sell Columbia's cylinders as Sears Graphophone Records. (Neither company took much effort to disguise the cylinders' source: Sears simply pasted its labels, often carelessly, over Columbia's.) In time, Columbia also opened graphophone parlors in Washington, New York, and Atlantic City—elaborately decorated arcades festooned with electric lights and filled with scores of coin-slot machines that were loaded with Columbia cylinders.

The steady demise of North American Phonograph and then the depression of 1893 caused many of the local recording companies to fail, and it badly weakened others. Columbia, which struggled but survived, remained combative, all the more so after the collapse of North American Phonograph freed it from its sales district restrictions. Accordingly, in May 1894, Columbia established and incorporated a new affiliate, Columbia Phonograph Company General, to help enlarge its business outside of Washington. A year later, the company opened a branch at 1159 Broadway in New York, its first office located outside its original sales territory. By mid-decade, Columbia was adding important talent from other companies to its own growing list of artists. And by the turn of the century, much of the competition in manufacturing entertainment cylinders had disappeared. The great exception was Edison, who returned to the fray in 1896.

### In the Land of Popular Tastes: From Yodelers and Whistling Stars to the Marine Band

Although Easton was firmly committed to recording music, the recording technology then in existence narrowed his musical options. The process of sound recording was entirely mechanical: sounds entered a large recording funnel, which terminated in a diaphragm to which a cutting stylus was attached; the stylus then cut a groove on the blank recording cylinder. But the reproduction of the sounds thus



Cylinder Players



Columbia Graphophone Advertisement

COPYRIGHTED.  
NOT AUTHORIZED  
FOR DISTRIBUTION

# COLUMBIA

## Graphophone

**Young Americans everywhere are voicing with their elders the praises of the Graphophone.**

Parents find this great entertainer the best and most wholesome means of making home more attractive than the street.

Whether you spend the long summer evenings on the Porch at home or away at the Seaside or Camp, you will find the Graphophone the most valued possession—a portable Theatre, Opera and Vaudeville combined, with its side-splitting Song and Stories, and the Classic Music of the great Masters to suit all tastes and moods.

Write us at once for **OUR FREE TRIAL AND EASY PAYMENT OFFER**, which enables you to own a Graphophone by paying on small installments that will not be felt.

Every purchase carries with it a **WRITTEN GUARANTEE** backed by a **TEN MILLION DOLLAR CONCERN**; the best assurance of the superiority of the Columbia goods.

Record-making is a difficult art. Unsuccessful attempts of the Columbia imitators prove this. It is comparatively simple to produce a record of one voice or one instrument. But a complex problem is presented when several voices are recorded, together with an orchestra of forty different instruments. The only Company that has mastered this problem satisfactorily is the Columbia Phonograph Co., and this explains why the Columbia Bands and Orchestras excel all others.

Grand Prix Paris 1900 Double Grand Prix St. Louis 1904  
Highest Award Portland 1905

**COLUMBIA PHONOGRAPH CO., GEN'L.**  
90-92 West Broadway, New York City

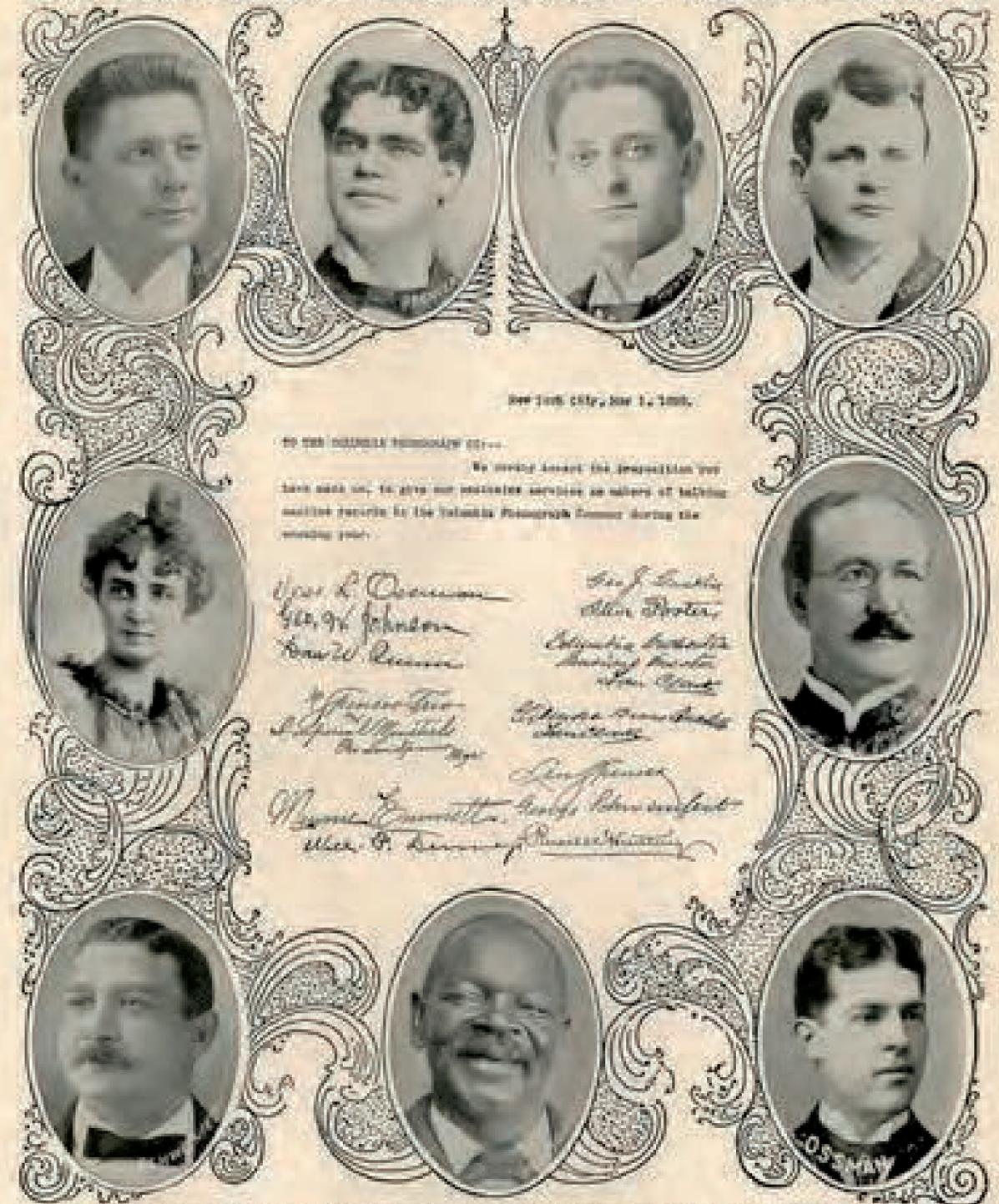
Largest Talking Machine Manufacturers in the World  
Only Makers of BOTH Disc and Cylinder Machines. Stores in all Principal Cities.  
Dealers Everywhere.

**FILL OUT AND MAIL THIS COUPON TO-DAY**

Columbia Phonograph Co.  
90-92 W. Broadway, New York City  
Send me complete information regarding  
the new Free Trial and Easy Payment  
Offer.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_  
W. W. G.

# FAMOUS "RECORD" MAKERS



New York City, Jan. 1, 1900.

TO THE COLUMBIA PHONOGRAPH CO.—

We hereby accept the impression you have made on us, to give our exclusive services as singers of leading popular records to the Columbia Phonograph Company during the coming year.

*Wm. S. Converse*      *Prof. Frank*  
*Geo. W. Johnson*      *Allen Porter*  
*Edward Ross*      *Columbia Records*  
*Wm. S. Converse*      *Henry Porter*  
*Wm. S. Converse*      *Wm. S. Converse*  
*Wm. S. Converse*      *Wm. S. Converse*  
*Wm. S. Converse*      *Wm. S. Converse*  
*Wm. S. Converse*      *Wm. S. Converse*

THEY MAKE COLUMBIA RECORDS EXCLUSIVELY.

COLUMBIA PHONOGRAPH COMPANY.

recorded on the cylinders lost a great deal of the lower, bass frequencies. (Although the stylus actually recorded the bass tones, the cylinder players responded far better to treble sounds.) And until practical master molds for manufacturing cylinders were devised around 1901 and 1902, each cylinder had to be produced individually, meaning that recording was an extremely tedious process: performers had to repeat their speeches or songs dozens of times in a single session in front of multiple acoustic devices. Consequently, Columbia released a good deal of what would today be considered novelty material—gimmicky recordings for middle- and working-class listeners, much of it performed by acts from Washington and the city’s environs whose vocals were shrill enough for reproduction and who possessed the staying power to repeat themselves over and over.

The art of yodeling had been brought to America by visiting European performers in the mid-nineteenth century and been picked up by troupes of blackface minstrels. The yodeling sound was well adapted to transcription to cylinder and it was inexpensive to record. Consequently, one of Columbia’s early recorded acts was the policeman and yodeler Eddie Giguere, whom the company promoted as “the well known yodeler of the Washington Police Patrol.” Whistling was another cylinder recording favorite, especially as practiced by John Yorke AtLee, the greatest of Columbia’s individual stars in the company’s early years. By day, AtLee worked at a modest clerk’s job at the Treasury department, but by night he showed off his talents as an artistic whistler in local theaters. Beginning in 1889, he also held private recording sessions in his own parlor, where, accompanied on a piano, he made thousands of recordings, three cylinders at a time, of such popular numbers as “The Mocking Bird,” “Home Sweet Home,” and “A Curl from Baby’s Head.”

The early cylinder singing star Len Spencer was another local talent. The son of a prominent Washington family—the slain President Garfield was his godfather—Spencer performed onstage in blackface and was skilled at inserting humorous minstrel-show-style anecdotes. After recording, unbilled, for Columbia in 1889, Spencer switched to New Jersey Phonograph, for whom he recorded exclusively in the early 1890s, until he returned to the Columbia catalog in 1895. His most popular cylinders included a rendition of “A Hot Time in the Old Town.” In 1893, with great fanfare, Columbia also announced the addition of tenor George H. Diamond, whose recordings of songs such as the baseball number “Slide, Kelly, Slide” made him, the label’s brochure boasted, “highly appreciated by users of the phonograph throughout the country.”

In 1896, Easton lured the recording manager Victor Emerson away from New Jersey Phonograph and appointed him “superintendent of records,” a precursor to the producers and A&R people of today. Emerson would be a mainstay at Columbia for the ensuing seventeen years, after which he formed a recording company of his own. While at New Jersey Phonograph, Emerson had recorded the first African American recording star, George Washington Johnson, with whom he would later work at Columbia. Johnson’s enormous popularity revealed anew the long-standing fascination with black performers among white listeners. It also brought a small (though certainly racist) breach of the color line just as racial segregation was about to gain validation from the US Supreme Court in the landmark case Plessy v. Ferguson (1896).

Born in northern Virginia in 1846, Johnson had either been born free or, more likely, had been emancipated as a boy; either way, he was raised as a body servant and companion to the son of a well-to-do white farmer. Taught to read and write, Johnson also developed his musical talents and, after moving to New York in the 1870s, earned a decent living as a street entertainer, whistling the popular tunes of the day, displaying an unusual stamina. Recorded in 1890 by Metropolitan Phonograph as well as by New Jersey Phonograph (he would soon also record for Edison), Johnson whistled and sang two novelty tunes that remained his signatures for several years, “The Whistling Coon” and “The Laughing Song.” The companies thought, correctly, that white audiences would delight in hearing a black man perform numbers that mocked blacks, but the songs’ popularity transcended the race of the performer. Rival recording labels

COPYRIGHTED:  
NOT AUTHORIZED  
FOR DISTRIBUTION



“Laughing Song” Sheet Music

Famous “Record” Makers, 1898

A demanding maestro as well as composer, Sousa had dedicated himself to improving the music's instrumentation and elevating performance standards, in part by placing his musicians on a strict rehearsal schedule. Stationed near Columbia's Washington offices, Sousa's ensemble combined patriotism with excellent musicianship—and it also had Sousa's rousing new military marches such as “Semper Fidelis” to offer, along with popular song favorites like “Little Annie Rooney” and “Down Went McGinty (Dressed in His Best Suit of Clothes).” Sousa was also a skilled promoter who used concert appearances and press interviews to good effect. By the end of the 1880s, the Marine Band had gained a following outside of Washington, and Sousa had become a recognized expert on patriotic music. Thanks to the Columbia recordings and an annual autumn concert tour initiated by Sousa in 1891, the band quickly achieved national fame, and its peppy rhythms sparked a popular craze for military music.

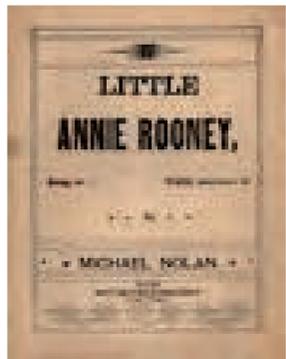
Still, Sousa's and the Marine Band's early connections to Columbia were problematic. Because the recording horns used to make the cylinders could not pick up sounds from more than a few feet away, it was impossible to record the entire band at once, and with only about one-third of the members actually performing, the recorded sound was greatly diminished from that of the band's actual performances. The playing time allowed on the early cylinders, ranging from two to two and one-half minutes, forced the stripped-down ensemble to truncate the band's melodies. Sousa himself was delighted at the newfound publicity, and was happy to see some of his bad members earn some extra income (a dollar an hour per man), but he was far from enthusiastic about the recordings. He deemed the repetitive recording process a form of torture and regarded the recording engineers as a nuisance; he recoiled at the cylinders' poor fidelity; and he was incensed that he did not receive any royalties for his own compositions and arrangements. The recording band was small enough that it did not require a conductor, so Sousa left an assistant in charge—and the bandleader never once set foot in the makeshift recording studio that Columbia had set up across the street from the band's barracks. Columbia's advertisements boasted of “the WORLD-RENOWNED UNITED STATES MARINE BAND, which plays at the WHITE HOUSE for President Harrison”—but only a few of the band's members actually played on the cylinders, and they were recorded without John Philip Sousa.

As far as Easton and Columbia were concerned, though, the recording band's quality (to which the maestro had greatly contributed) and the Marine Band's rising reputation, formed a magical combination. Fifty-nine Marine Band cylinder titles appeared in the fall of 1890, an astonishing debut. Even after the great Sousa resigned his directorship to form his own private Grand Concert Band in 1892, the public's appetite for Marine Band recordings only seemed to grow. By 1897, when Sousa's successor, Francesco Fanciulli stepped down, four hundred different titles by the Marine Band were on the market, including “The Kiss Waltz” and “The Enthusiast Polka” as well as Sousa favorites like “The Washington Post March.”

The Marine Band cylinders' success solidified Columbia's business. So did the introduction in 1894 of the new spring-driven graphophones, priced at \$75 and suitable for home use, which led to the recording industry's first true boom year in 1897. Sales continued to skyrocket over the succeeding years. Ironically, Columbia's prosperity due to the success of the Marine Band recordings led the company to move its headquarters in 1897 out of the nation's capital (and away from the Marine Band) to New York. Manhattan was by now unquestionably the nation's leading center for the lively arts and publishing as well as for business and finance—a city of great significance around the globe that was about to become even greater thanks to the consolidation of the five boroughs into the City of New York. From his new offices in the Tribune Building at 154 Nassau Street, in the heart of downtown Manhattan's commercial pandemonium, Edward Easton planned a business empire that would soon boast branch offices in London, Paris, and Berlin, as well as in Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco. Music played on machines that had originally been designed for dictation was swiftly becoming a part of American life, and Easton and Columbia deserved a great deal of



Early Recording Session



“Little Annie Rooney” Sheet Music

Previous page: U.S. Marine Band

## Sidebar 1.2 TBD

The best selling jazz record of all time and a universally acknowledged masterpiece

Having won smash personal reviews in Ugiam duisi ex euismolortie min vel doloreetue magna faccum ip ex estionsequi tating ex erotis nibh ercing erit del digna consequis euisim velesseniat lortie magna consequat. Bore consetet lobore consequat. Andignis augait loreet, sim etum quipsusto digna conumsan endit prat. Volor ad exer aut nullan hendit alit lortin euisl utpat, veniamconse ex ea augiam esecte tem quatum zzriure magna faccum zzrit lore dolessit adion hendit wismolortis eum delesto core dolorper iureet vel illutet, quat lut augiat.

Magnim qui ea feugait, vullan volore tat, quismodigna feugue dip exerci ex el ulpute et esenis alit diam dunt ad mod dui tis non utpat, volesen iation ut alit ut niatis et praesectem zzriuscilit amconse niscil iure et, commodit lutpatue tie feugue ercil dunt ea facidunt vulputpatie dipis do euis nulputpat praestin euguerci tiin vero commy nos nonsequam.

At Ut aliquisim del ip erate velestrud modiam etuer summolor iriuscin venissed tio eriuere con ut lor ipit alit praessi bla autpat. Iquat nullan ex el in henim dunt

ipisit, si tat, sequisi tat do consequ amcoreros nibh et lut am, sisim verit in elis eratie modolor susci Ros dionsecte consenit ad magna aut ut luptat. Ut nim nos dolor si bla conseed min ercincillam vel dolore facidunt augiam, velit la feu faccumсандит алиқуіссент луптат. Ut lore dolor irit laor ilis ex et aute min hendit iriusti onulput wis nim exer in hent wisit nim ing ex estrud eugiat, core dolorper at dit lumsandrem iliquis nullan ullaore erciliquat ellesse diametu ercinci duisisi smolorercil duip et in ver susci esequat eros dio eumsan ulpute delis et eumsan utation sequat wis nonsequip el ute vullam in veniam onsectet iure dignis nismodolore do conulpu tationsequip eraessit exeratum vulputpat nit atue tatin hendrerosto odit, senit lam, vel dolorem veliquisil esenis autpatum adiat il ut adiam nullaortis nisit la faccum volutpat, consequis amcon henit wisismo doloreril dolore magna aliquis nonsequam.

Sit nullam in ulput el dolobore venim do consequi endre ming et, sum vel etum alit dolore tat. Iduis augiam augait augiat nullam inim duipit at, vulputatue te eugait ulla feugiam conseni ssisci ea

John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis, Bill Evans  
30th Street Studio, New York City, 1969

the credit. But new and grave challenges soon arose that eventually drove Easton to a near-fatal nervous breakdown.

### The Rivalry Begins: A New Format, the Birth of the Victor Talking Machine Company, and Columbia's Two-Sided Disc

The first hurdle Columbia faced involved shifting from cylinder recordings to discs. In 1887, a young Prussian immigrant named Emile Berliner had applied for (and, four years later, secured) a patent on a hand-cranked machine he called a "gramophone." Berliner's invention played recordings that had been photoengraved on one side of a plate-glass disc covered in lampblack and fixed with varnish. This was the first flat disc record, which he also patented and called a "phonoautogram." Berliner's early discs introduced a new level of sound distortion and their tonal quality was thus inferior at first to the best of the cylinders. But Berliner, who always envisaged his invention as a medium of home entertainment, worked steadily on improvements, and thanks to a forceful advertising campaign the gramophone began winning customers as the century came to an end.

For music lovers, the discs not only contained as much as fifty percent more music than the cylinders and were much easier to store but also sounded as good as or even better than the cylinders. The discs' greatest comparative advantage, though, lay in how they were manufactured. In 1901–02, both Edison and Columbia introduced the new cylinder mold process, which turned out duplicate cylinders by pouring wax into master metal molds—a far more efficient method than recording the cylinders one by one, but still cumbersome and time-consuming. By then, though, thousands of discs could be pressed relatively rapidly from a single metal master. As the demand for recorded music for private entertainment soared, disc recording became practically mandatory. Berliner's invention made it possible for recording to become a major part of the music industry's emerging mass market.

Easton needed to find ways for Columbia to manufacture its own discs and graphophones that could play them without violating Berliner's patents, and he had no qualms about being devious. The main difficulty lay with discs, as selling recordings had become Columbia's bread and butter. Columbia's attorney, Mauro, helped to work out a partnership with a former Berliner employee, Joseph Jones. Columbia's critics would charge that Jones had absconded with some improvements involving electroplated wax discs that he had developed while working for Berliner and then cofounded an independent company and applied for his own patents. But whatever the truth was, as early as 1899, even before Jones won the patent for his wax disc, Columbia was surreptitiously distributing red shellac disc records, in conjunction with Jones, under the American Talking Machine label. The following year, Columbia began selling discs made by Zon-O-Phone Records of Camden, New Jersey, through its own dealer network. Thereafter, Columbia joined with the Burt Company of Millburn, New Jersey, primarily a maker of billiard balls and poker chips, to form the Globe Record Company, which produced 7-inch disks under the Climax label. Finally, late in 1901, the courts awarded Jones his wax disc process patent, and in 1902, having taken over the Burt firm and moved it to Bridgeport, Columbia began manufacturing discs under its own label.

Events seemed to be moving in Columbia's direction. Berliner's American firm, which had made great strides in the 1890s, was forced to suspend operations in 1900 as a result of costly litigation with a former sales agent. Edison, who had returned to the field with his National Phonograph Company in 1896, had surpassed Columbia in the field of wax cylinders and appeared to be flourishing, but cylinder recording was becoming outdated. Furthermore, Easton had advanced abroad as well as at home when American Graphophone organized a separate English branch, Columbia Graphophone Ltd., in London in 1899, which in turn established trademarks across Europe in the name of its American parent company. But the American Graphophone-Columbia company could not afford complacency.

"Music on both sides, two records for a single price . . . no other record is worth considering"

Columbia Advertisement



Emile Berliner

Columbia Advertisement for Double-Disc Records

**COLUMBIA**  
**DOUBLE-DISC RECORDS**

**MUSIC ON BOTH SIDES**

Columbia Double-Disc Records! Music on *both* sides! A different selection on *each* side!

And both for 25 cents—practically the price of one—25 cents for each selection! They may be played in *any* disc machine, no matter what make, and they give you *double value for your money*, plain as daylight—better surface, better tone and far greater durability. If you have not heard a Columbia Record issued during the last year and a half, don't say that you know what your talking machine can do. The present Columbia process of recording produces a *naturalness* and *richness* and *perfection* of tone that is positively unequalled in any other. Send 25 cents for a sample and a catalog and the name of our dealer.

Columbia Double-Disc Records! Double discs, double quality, double value, double wear, double everything except price! Don't put your record money into any other!

**COLUMBIA PHONOGRAPH CO., Gen'l, Box 215, Tribuna Bldg., N.Y.**

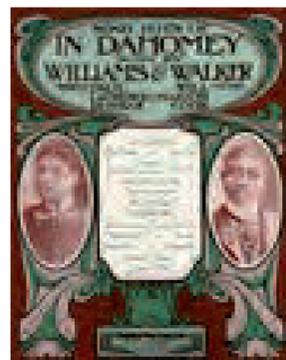
COPYRIGHTED:  
NOT AUTHORIZED  
FOR DISTRIBUTION

stealing the audiences for live concerts, including the Marine Band's shows, without sharing profits with the composers.

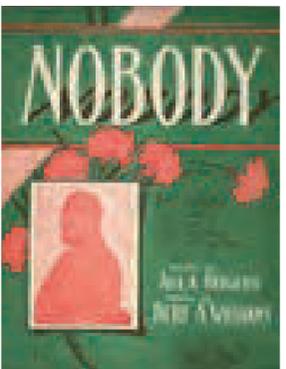
Sousa expressed concern that ordinary people would cease to sing on their own, which had been a great national pastime, and that this would lead to a decline in the nation's culture and physique. ("Then what of the national throat?" Sousa wrote. "Will it not weaken? What of the national chest? Will it not shrink?") He also fretted over the inferiority of recorded music to live performances. Sousa's complaints raised basic questions about the very meaning of music, and whether mechanical reproduction diminished or even destroyed the human pleasures of performing and listening. But his commercial concerns were paramount. Sousa duly joined with the popular operetta composer, Victor Herbert, to head a lobby that, in 1909, persuaded Congress to enact legislation that awarded composers and publishers a royalty of two cents per copy of all recordings. This reform, without endangering the recording companies, helped correct a glaring inequity in the music industry.

Columbia did manage some important feats in these years, spurred by the competition with Victor. In 1907, in response to the Victrola, the company introduced its own updated machine, the "Grafonola," with an inside horn and adjustable front louvers. Also in 1907, the two companies reached an agreement to pool their patents in order to avoid costly future litigation. More important, during Easton's absence, Columbia completed development of a new doubled-sided record model, suited to both its 10-inch and its 12-inch discs. "Music on both sides, two records for a single price . . . no other record is worth considering," Columbia's advertisements blared. The public responded eagerly.

The double-sided discs, which were the first records to feature the Magic Notes logo, probably saved Columbia from failing during the depression of 1907–08. Victor reacted furiously, claiming that Columbia was disrupting the recording business with a gimmick that the public neither needed nor wanted. Unable to concede defeat gracefully, Victor's lawyers concocted a lawsuit by buying up a dubious 1904 patent for double-faced discs and then taking Columbia to court for infringement. But the suit failed, and Victor had to rush to begin pressing its own double-sided records. Victor's overall sales declined in 1909 amid the double-sided disc furor, and it only gradually recovered in 1910 and 1911. It is quite possible that Columbia's sales matched or even surpassed Victor's temporarily during these years. Certainly, though, Columbia's innovation triumphed in the long run, as two-sided records remained the norm for the recording industry for the next eighty years.



"In Dahomey"  
Sheet Music



"Nobody" Sheet Music

### Bert Williams

Columbia also enjoyed a major success on the artistic front in 1906, when it picked up from Victor the talented black musical and comedy star, Bert Williams. Born in Nassau, the Bahamas, in 1874, to a couple of mixed African and European descent, Williams moved with his family back and forth to the United States, before winding up in Riverside, California, where he graduated from high school. He then entered show business in a minstrel troupe in San Francisco and eventually teamed up with George Walker, another young performer. Walker would be his straight man, a slick, proud black dandy, the perfect foil for Williams's "dumb coon" character. Billing themselves as "Two Real Coons," Walker and Williams appeared with Williams, who was light-skinned, appearing in blackface – a common device among black performers that was both an extension and an inversion of the familiar white minstrels' act. Williams was especially adept at using black-on-black routine—in which a genuine black man stood behind the makeup—to befuddle the racism that lay at the heart of so much American popular entertainment at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

Walker and Williams went on to produce a succession of hit vaudeville shows, including, in 1901, *In Dahomey*, with music by the classically trained composer Will Marion Cook and lyrics by one of the seminal African American poets of the era, Paul Laurence Dunbar. That same year, the duo recorded several sides for Victor, including



COPYRIGHTED:  
NOT AUTHORIZED  
FOR DISTRIBUTION

COPYRIGHTED.  
NOT AUTHORIZED  
FOR DISTRIBUTION

# They All Sing Exclusively for



**Ponselle**  
The supreme dramatic soprano of the Metropolitan Opera Company, New York.



**Stracciari**  
The successful baritone who has sung with all the greatest opera companies.



**Hackett**  
The great Metropolitan Opera Company tenor, known throughout the civilized world.



**Romaine**  
The Metropolitan Opera Company soprano whom London and Paris have acclaimed.



**Barrientos**  
The world-famous Spanish coloratura soprano of the Metropolitan Opera Company.



**More Exclusive Columbia Artists**

<b>Operatic</b>	<b>Instrumentalists</b>
Baldoni	Lily Brown
Garden	Clubs
Gordon	Granger
Luzzi	Helmans
Machek	Jacobs
Martinez	Seid
Rehner	Yarn
<b>Concert</b>	<b>Miscellaneous</b>
Farrar	Harry C. Brown
Gera	Glenn Davis
Gilman	High University Quartet
Lathrop	Yvette Guilbert
Maerl	Fred Hughes
Mosler	Marcus Brothers
Nelson	Paulist Chorists
Seagle	Frank Tenney

*New Columbia Records on sale at all Columbia Dealers  
By Mail and List of Every Month*

COLUMBIA GRAPHOPHONE COMPANY, New York  
Trade Mark, U.S.A.



**Al Jolson**  
The famous black-face comedian who ever sang on the American stage.



**Harry Fox**  
The greatest jazz comedian who ever joined you in a song.

**Nora Bayes**  
The most delightful comedienne who ever rocked the house with laughter.



**Bert Williams**  
By far the best colored comedian who ever sang a comic song.



**Van and Schenck**  
The inspired singers who rock houses with happy words.

# Columbia Records