

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

Story of Gramophone Recordings in New Zealand Told to WILTON BAIRD

IT'S a far cry now to those old days when someone hitched the tin horn in position, put a cylinder on the gramophone and let go, while after a good deal of scratching and scraping, not unlike a male choir giving preliminary coughs, a strong nasal voice blared out:

"In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree," sung by J. W. Myers, Edison record, London, New York and Paris.

Most of us have forgotten those days, but one man in New Zealand remembers all about them. They were part of his life.

HE remembers them so well that if you ask him, as I did, what was the first gramophone recording ever made of a big orchestra he will say:

"Schubert's Unfinished Symphony, by the Court Symphony Orchestra, made in London. I haven't seen that recording for many a long year. Let me see. It was Columbia, 442, in the catalogue, or 244. No, 442 was 'Traviata.'"

We took the trouble there and then to look up an old catalogue and check. It was 244 all right.

That is how well Mr. Sid Vause, now the man who looks after ZZB's recordings, remembers those early discs in New Zealand.

They must have been almost human to him, and he watched them grow up from infancy, develop, and mature into the perfect things they are to-day . . . watched much as a father watches his family grow up.

Followed The Band

IT was 30 years ago as a youth that Mr. Vause first became associated with gramophones. Before that, from a very early age, he had always been fascinated by music.

Even in the days when the wandering German bands used to visit New Zealand he was always one of the boys who followed on behind, missed their lunch and got a tanning for it when they came home.

When the first Edison cylinder reached New Zealand, the gramophone business was merely a side-line to the cycle and sewing-machine trade. Doing clerical work at the time for a Wellington business firm, Mr. Vause felt the strong tug of those early record-



TO-DAY

... Three tons of records in England waiting shipment overseas.

ings. He used to go to a music shop in Barrett's Buildings at night, after his work was done, to work among his records.

DO you remember those early artists who recorded: Manuel Romaine, the singer; Will Oakland, the counter-tenor; Billy Williams, the comedian; and Collins and Harman, ragtime singers?

It wasn't long before Mr. Vause was induced to leave his clerical work and go into the retail side of the gramophone business.

Those were the days long before radio when people would come into a shop and say: "Give me a couple of pounds' worth of records, please. I leave it to you to choose them."

But, since radio arrived, they don't say that very much to-day.

Cylinders To Discs

AND now, in the business itself, Mr. Vause saw recording technique begin its process of evolution. The cylindrical recordings gave way to those on discs.

One disc recording on the market in those early days was the Pathe, a disc which was played from inside to out. Instead of a needle, the machine had a sapphire point.

They lasted a long time, those discs, they were very hard. Some of the worlds' best artists were recorded on them. To-day some of those old discs are fetching fancy prices from collectors.

They have an historic value to-day. And it is not hard to imagine someone paying a fancy price for a recording of Melba singing to an accompaniment played by Verdi.

As works of art they were not brilliant, shouted as they were into the old tin horn. And some of the artists who made these early recordings disliked them so much that they would not let them go out.

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MR. S. VAUSE

... Records man at ZZB.