

**From Berliner to RCA Victor: The Birth and Rise of the Recording Industry in Canada = *Naissance et essor de l'industrie du disque au Canada***. Brossard, Qué.: Gala Records, Gal 112, 2009. 1 compact disc + 1 booklet (79 p.). Various performers. See the [Gala Records](#) website for pricing and availability at various stores.

This production is a commemoration of *Montréal, berceau de l'industrie du disque (Montreal, the Cradle of the Recording Industry)*, an exhibit presented in 2008 by the Musée des ondes Émile Berliner, a museum established in 1996 in the former RCA Victor factory in the St. Henri neighbourhood of southwest Montreal. It is the twelfth in a series of remastered historic Canadian recordings from veteran producer Jean-Pierre Sévigny on his Gala Records label, and one of the final projects supported by the Audio-Visual Preservation Trust of Canada (1996-2010), a federally funded advocacy group for the protection of and access to Canada's heritage films and sound recordings.

The booklet, in French with English translation, is devoted to the tangled history of financial, legal, and ownership details, technical developments, and clashing personalities in the business, from Émile Berliner's early inventions and productions in the 1880s, through format and company changes, as far as the SONY-BMG merger in 2004. Images of early studios, equipment, labels, and advertisements are scattered through the text. There are also photographs and brief biographies of the performers on the CD. Berliner's elder son Herbert emerges as the first champion of Canadian content, creating a series of recordings of local artists. His colleague, Hugh A. Joseph, in his thirty-five-year career in charge of artists and repertoire, continued to contract and record both French and English talent. A final chapter, "From Tanneries to Technologies: The History of Saint-Henri," positions the RCA Victor factory in the context of the 350-year life of this community.

Sévigny, with authoritative researcher and writer Robert Thérien, has reworked this story for a general audience, and illustrated it with some of the most appealing recordings from the Berliner/Victor/RCA Victor catalogues from 1903 to 1959, reflecting the period of the careers of Hubert Berliner and Hugh A. Joseph. The listings are brief, just a title, performers' names, and year of recording. If this piques the public curiosity, librarians can direct them to further discographical information in AMICUS, and the original discs held in the collections of Library and Archives Canada.

The English translation is smooth and idiomatic, with just one curious lapse: the French word *supports* is carried over into English, rather than translated into "formats" (for 78s, LPs, etc.). In a probably unintended pun, George Wade, leader of the Cornhuskers, is described as "a caller by vocation" (*métier*).

The CD includes twenty-seven examples from the Montreal studios – spoken word, popular, national, and comic songs, two classical excerpts, and a performance by Oscar Peterson, plus a newly recorded spoken "Introduction" by Émile Berliner's American

grandson, Oliver. The popularity of country music is reflected in the presence of hits by both anglophone (Wilf Carter and Hank Snow) and francophone (Paul Brunelle and Willie Lamothe) cowboy singers.

Of the five earliest vocal tracks, three, featuring tenors E. Loiseau, Robert Price, and Henry Burr, were (and are) already available on the [Virtual Gramophone](#) site. And of the later repertoire, there is much that can be found on the four-CD set, *La variété québécoise: Histoire de la chanson à succès* or the ten CDs of *Une simple mélodie*, both issued in 2007. Searches in AMICUS and in WorldCat show very few holdings of these anthologies, however, so this disc of expertly chosen highlights represents an easy way for any library to offer an introduction to Canadian musical heritage. The sound quality accurately represents the changes over the era, from decent to excellent.

The Cornhuskers mentioned above include the brilliant violinist Jean Carignan, and track nine features him in a thrilling version of “The Devil’s Dream” which my Scottish-country-dancing feet know as “De’il among the Tailors.” Another highlight is Lucille Dumont’s seductive, authentically bilingual version of “Darling, je vous aime beaucoup.” The disc ends with a cover by Les Jérolas of “Yakety Yak,” the biggest hit of the Coasters. This rock’n’roll hymn to teenage angst, by Lieber and Stoller, is at least as funny in French as in the original American English.

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