

**A REPORT ON THE 25TH ANNUAL CANADIAN COLLECTORS' CONGRESS (TORONTO, 27TH APRIL 1996)**

Gerald Parker  
Université du Québec à Montréal

*Note: The following report was edited by me with limited input from the author, who was unfortunately on vacation when this issue was in preparation. Ed.*

The Canadian Collectors' Congress just past had an unusually celebratory hue to it. The sessions of 27 April marked a quarter century of jazz research and the fellowship of collections and mavens of jazz, blues, Gospel music, swing and related genres, with emphasis on the discography, rollography, and filmography of the music which these collectors and savants so love. Many present had attended all twenty-five of the congresses, which are held in Toronto every year. The opening remarks by Trevor Tolley of the Montreal Vintage Music Society recalled earlier conferences, and paid special tribute to Gene and Brenda Miller, whose hard work and perseverance have done so much to ensure the continuation of the congress.

The morning session consisted of the Discographical/Research Seminars, in which participants gave short reports on projects, findings, pleas for help in research or collecting, etc.

Trevor Tolley spoke on the UK Brunswick label, discussing jazz 78 rpm releases issued in Britain on the Brunswick label, but never released in the United States as 78 rpm discs. He gave a history of the British Brunswick label, from its inception in 1916, and explained that if Brunswick records were issued in both countries, they bore the same release numbers; if only released in the UK, then the British number has no equivalent.

Chris Ferreira asked for leads on seeking out an expert on Clarence Williams, whose whereabouts have been highly elusive. Next, Gerry Arthur spoke glowingly of W.W.II service dance bands and of their fine work, backed up by some very impressive recorded examples. Included was a sample of "Bob" (later Robert) Farnon, leading a Canadian service band before he went transatlantic and based his career in England. Among the highlights was a British service band featuring the fabulously talented 11-year-old percussionist Victor Feldman (!), and a hot cut by

Django Reinhardt with a band of the US Army Air Transport Corps (European Division).

Roger Misiewicz gave an update on reissues of blues and Gospel recordings. The 1990s has seen the availability of these genres grow. He reported that Oxford University Press is still planning a reissue of the blues and Gospel discography of Godrich and Dixon. Hopefully, it will mention reissues of those 78 rpm recordings on CD, and update the listings to fill in gaps. John Norris than gave a survey of newly released and recently recorded CDs, covering a wide spectrum of jazz styles.

Don Chichester, that jazz-loving clergyman, spoke about home recordings made acoustically in the 1940s. He reminded us that home and office recording was a primary goal of Edison's early developments in sound recording technology. While the vast amount of material on these home-made recordings is uninteresting, sometimes they capture radio broadcasts or other sources of wider musical interest. Reverend Don explained the formats of some of these home recordings, such as Victor's blank discs with pre-made grooves into which the stylus would pass the musical message; other companies also made blank discs. There was even an "Echo" disc made to record by means of a home acoustical horn. As electrical recording became more common, such acoustically-based ways of making home recordings disappeared. Cardboard blank were used widely to record on electrical machines, preserving many airchecks of great interest.

Phil Posychala spoke about the need to renew the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors (IAJRC), especially as members' interests are changing and as their hairlines recede, and teeth too, with age. During a meal break, I sat with Phil, and his devotion to, and concern about the IAJRC, was the subject of conversation throughout the meal. He reported that the membership directly would now be issued every two years. He also gave us a preview of the upcoming IAJRC conference in Libertyville, Ill. (near Chicago).

Mike Montgomery reported on his findings in his favoured research area of piano roll recordings. He now has 140 piano rolls cut by George Gershwin, so he became a consultant for the Nonesuch label of reissues of Gershwin's rolls. He also reminded those present that Dick Zimmerman, the editor-publisher of Maple Leaf Rag Times, has produced *Gems of Texas Ragtime*, which contains the complete works of Eudal L. Bowman, of "12th Street Rag" fame. Order forms for this were available at the conference's registration desk.

Mike Montgomery then explained the copyright saga behind Perry Bradford's fabled stay in prison. It turns out that there was a musician whose real identity remains unknown, who used the professional pseudonym "Lem Fowler." Mike did much research to try to identify this person, but despite combing through census data, birth registrations, and many other primary sources, he found no indication that a person of such name really existed. Mike undertook this research because he is compiling a sonography of the works of "Lem Fowler." "Lem's" output includes *Four day blues* (1919; not published, but copyrighted as arr. by Clarence M. Jones); *Sleepy Hollow* (1920; copyrighted and published); *Take it easy* (1921); *Ain't got nothing blues* (1922), and *The Fowler twist* (1922). The really big hit that "Fowler" had was *He may be your man (but he comes to see me sometimes)*, copyrighted in 1922. Perry Bradford purchased the copyright to this successful song on May 1, 1922. While Bradford owned the copyright, it was recorded by Lucille Hegamin and Trixie Smith. Later in 1922, Ted Browne Publishing purchased the copyright, but Bradford continued to collect royalty monies illegally. Browne took Bradford to court, and Bradford lost the case. Mike finds considerable enjoyment in so deftly undertaking an investigation that a collector/researcher can undertake from his favourite chair, using chronologically verified information. Such puzzlers as the "Fowler," "Bradford," and "Browne" credits for the same song can be interesting and challenging to unravel.

Ross Brethour spoke of his research on the indomitable and effervescent Rose Murphy. He has recently completed a discography, with some commentary, on this singer and piano stylist. The discography may be purchased for \$5.00 (CDN or US), by contacting Brethour directly. He mentioned some CD reissues of this performer's recordings,

including one of all 14 sides which she recorded for Decca (available on CD from MCA France). From his vast collection, he provided some hard-to-find recordings for reissue projects concentrating on Ralph Marterie and Rosemary Clooney. Ross intends to publish a Clooney discography, including published and unreleased recordings.

Bert Joss, from the Montréal area, spoke of now-famous recording of Charlie Parker live at the Chez Paree in Montréal. (Parker also made a television appearance while in Montréal on the same visit.) Bert kept a dubbing of the tape; this was fortunate, since the master tape was ruined. Bert confirmed that Mark Miller's published account of the Charlie Parker appearance and recording is correct in all but a few minor details.

Russ Shor described improvements in his publication, *Vintage Jazz Mart*, that change it from being mostly a collectors' sales venture into solid research print forum. He has upgraded the quality of the publication in every aspect, with articles and discographies appearing regularly in the issues. He mentioned that he is seeking paid articles on Canadian topics, and that classified ads are included in the publication for free. He also announced that a discography of the Black Swan label will soon be published.

Jim "The Kid" Kidd recounted the origins of the two sponsoring research collector clubs of the CCC, namely the Montreal Vintage Music Society and the West Mississauga Jazz Muddies, which in the early years alternated in hosting the congress until it became clear that Toronto was the preferred site.

The afternoon sessions began with Colin Bray and Jack Litchfield giving an "Evaluation of the Montreal Compo Ledgers and Jazz and Blues Issued on Early Canadian Labels." Rather than being a joint presentation, Colin and Jack divided the session into two parts. Colin spoke on celebrity recordings in general, covering the labels Victor, Brunswick, Vocalion, Aurora, Columbia, Phonola, and many Compo Co. labels. Compo had an incredible profusion of labels, some geared to regional or various commercial markets. In the Compo Co. ledgers, one often encounters Herbert Berliner's note "Canadian territorial" and other market indications for such recordings. Jack Litchfield's part of the session described the Compo Co. ledgers themselves. The

manuscript ledgers are at the National Library of Canada, and Jack is transcribing the information in the ledgers. Berliner's ledgers list all Compo Co. production in its mainline series, from the first record lists for 1919, a year after the Compo Co.'s factory had opened in Lachine, Quebec. As a former sound engineer, retired from the CBC, Jack is uniquely qualified to undertake the task of deciphering the ledgers, for they include much fascinating detail on technical aspects of the recording sessions; his background is especially useful in decoding the experimental ledgers of the Compo Co.'s engineers. The session entries for each master often include technical data, as well as more routine information such as song titles and performers. The word "use" indicates the matrix chosen for release. Indicating the placement of horns or microphones in relation to the instruments verifies what the instrumentation actually is, something not always obvious on 78 rpm recordings with their various degrees of "low fidelity." Normally for electrical recordings, only one microphone was used, its placement often indicated; for acoustical recordings, the placements of the various horns are shown, as they fed to one recording point. The engineers' ledger reveals that the company was experimenting with electrical recording as early as 1924, four months before the experiments of the US-based Victor company. Even after the introduction of electrical recording, however, some sessions were recorded acoustically, especially the French-Canadian sessions. Three different recording venues were used, including Berliner's own home for sessions requiring the use of his pipe organ. Compo used a New York City studio for some sessions recorded in the United States, and sometimes recorded live sessions on site as well. Some recordings were made from radio broadcasts, sometimes with questionable legal propriety! Rather colourful comments sometimes indicate Berliner's opinion of the recordings made in his company's studios. Among some anecdotal comments, Jack mentioned that Annette Hanshaw's famous sign-off expression, "That's all!" comes from a question that Berliner posed during a recording session; when she heard the comment on the test pressing she like it so much that she used it at the end of her recordings from that time on.

Mark Miller's major presentation reported on the research for his soon-to-be-published book *Researching the Early History of Jazz in Canada:*

*Ways, Means, and Interesting Discoveries.* This topic requires some novel approaches to jazz research, since so little of the earliest jazz in Canada was recorded. John Gilmour's books on the jazz scene in Montreal are really the only books before Mark's to attempt such an account. He went into some detail on his research methodology. Miller found many references to jazz players appearing in Canada at very early dates in a wide variety of sources. His keen eye noticed a caption in the *Eddy Condon Scrapbook of Jazz* (published in 1973), to a photograph taken in Winnipeg which includes American and Canadian musicians. The details of the recordings which were made, and their inclusion in discographies, was very useful, but few of the musicians he mentions in the book were ever recorded. Much information about trips of American musicians to Canada appear in black community newspapers from the period, a resource which has been largely ignored (and which remains largely unindexed). The black papers, however, have much better coverage of jazz for these years. A particularly useful paper was the *Chicago Defender*. The *Edmonton Journal* was also useful, since the city had a strong market for jazz. He noted that one must examine the advertisements, events listings, and other features, not just the articles and reviews. The *Journal* often provided much valuable information on what the musicians played and sometimes a photograph, which is particularly useful when there is no recorded evidence of the performance. Mark found, interestingly enough, that jazz groups in Canada were more integrated and at an earlier date than in the United States (where black and white musicians rarely performed together in groups). For the 1930s and 1940s, Mark found more resources in personal recollections, scrap books, interviews, and other such sources than for the two preceding decades. This presentation is worth hearing on cassette, if only to give eager researchers some clues on how to undertake jazz research where discographical information provides little or no help.

Clyde Clark and Peter Bartram together hosted a grand and stirring "Tribute to the pioneers of the traditional jazz revival in Toronto, 1945-1960," as the last afternoon session. Many of the musicians who are among the surviving "pioneers" were present as panelists, including Toronto jazz worthies Ian Arnott, Peter Bartram, Clyde Clark, Ken Dean, Wilf Goldstick, Bud Hill, Art Schawlow, and Michael Snow; senior Toronto jazz journalists Alex Barris was

program director. Absent due to illness or mishap were Don Priestman, Ron Sullivan, and Cy Ware, who had also been slated for inclusion on the panel. This was yet another primarily celebratory event (a jubilation of traditional jazz in its first full blossoming in Toronto) of a celebratory conference (rejoicing, as already noted, in 25 years of the C.C.C.). The speakers were full of anecdotes, opinions, humorous reminiscences, and memories of their camaraderie across the years. It is difficult to give a coherent report of the welter of details, facts, dates, etc. that came out among all the nostalgia, since there was much leaping to and fro across the years. At the conclusion of this session, the assembled "pioneers" each received a citation in honour of his contribution to Toronto's jazz life. The citation mentioned what each performer in particular had accomplished.

In addition to the seminars and presentations of April 27, there was opportunity for socializing, live music, record swapping, and other shared activities. On Thursday night, those who arrived early enjoyed some live music at Toronto's jazz club, the "C'est What?" Colin Bray brought in Brian Towers' band, the Five Hot Jazz Makers (of which Bray is the double bass player), and they played some swinging music; some of the conference attendees sat in with the group for a few numbers. On Saturday itself, the by-now traditional "Discon" session followed the evening meal. This event consisted of a sort of collective "record recital." After a brief introduction and some

commentary, each participant who has brought along a treasure to share plays his record, sharing a rare item, showing it (the original, not some cassette!) to those present, and basks in the tide of mutual admiration of his assembled comrades. It is quite a treat to both see and hear these rarities. Then on Sunday afternoon, Jeff Healey's "Hot House Shout" took place at his home, where the assembled could play and comment on favourite records and eat, drink, and socialize some more.

The 25th annual Canadian Collectors' Congress in Toronto was a particularly joyous and fulfilling experience. No jazz researcher, enthusiast, music librarian, jazz musician, or anyone else interested in jazz, should deny himself or herself the pleasure, intellectual and artistic stimulation, and information that any C.C.C. provides, year after year. The 26th annual conference will be held in Toronto in the spring of 1997.

Note: Audio and video tapes of most sessions may be obtained from Eugene Miller, and most speakers will provide copies of their handouts if requested. Addresses may be obtained from the membership directory of the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors (IAJRC) and/or the Canadian Antique Phonograph Society (CAPS).

