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*Slovenian Traditional Music and the Media: A Study of Early Gramophone Records**

ABSTRACT: The article focuses on early commercial recorded music on gramophone records and analyses the beginnings of commercialisation and popularisation of Slovenian traditional music through new technical advances and the emergence of the gramophone industry. It is based on an analysis of a large amount of material, collected in the Digital Collection of Gramophone Records at the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU in Ljubljana, Slovenia, as well as on various written sources and metadata. Slovenian material on early gramophone records, known predominantly as 78 rpm records or shellac records, was being recorded for a good fifty years, from the very first recordings in the early 20th century to the end of the era of these gramophone records in the mid-1950s. Due to the characteristics of the mass medium, the traditional music, which can frequently be found on the early Slovenian gramophone recordings, moved outside its traditional and local bounds and becoming part of the culture industry and marketing. The article presents the characteristics of this medium and the recordings made on it, and shows how such recordings can help to shed new light on various aspects of traditional music. It reveals that folk tradition was adapted, popularised and transmitted for different types of audiences and raises the question of commercialism and its influence on the further development of traditional musical creativity, popularisation and contribution to the development of new popular-music genres.

KEYWORDS: sound recordings, gramophone records, traditional music, mass media, music industry, commercialisation and popularisation

Introduction

Slovenians were acquainted with the new media and the possibilities of listening to the recorded sound early on, as can be seen from various newspaper articles. One of the earliest articles that relate to recording and sound reproduction can be found already in 1890, very soon after the gramophone first appeared

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on the market¹. Alfons Oblak² published in the Dolenjske novice newspaper a quite comprehensive article entitled “Fonograf, grafofon in gramofon” (Phonograph, Graphophone and Gramophone). Basing his article on the 1889 World’s Fair held in Paris, he briefly described the operation and history of the devices and added his – at the time very visionary–thoughts about the possibilities arising from the new technical achievements:

“There is no need to [...] particularly emphasise the immense importance, the future and the changes the device for preserving and repeating sound brought about all around the world; suffice to say, for now, that the device will make it possible for future generations to listen to their great-grandfathers’ conversations, lectures and singing in the original voice; and that it is only a matter of time before phonographs are used in courts, to teach singers in various voices, before the lectures of artists, scholars and teachers [...] are phonographed and all people are able to [...] enjoy educational, historical, religious, entertaining or funny lectures, singing, sermons, the music performed by individual or multiple instruments etc. in the comfort of their own homes as many times as they like without any other people and preparations, using nothing but a small phonograph to learn new things and pass the time. It is also only a matter of time before the phonograph teaches children how to speak and pray, [...] before it replaces a priest on the pulpit, an organist on the organ loft, singers at concerts, musicians in theatres and at dances [...], and jokers in people’s company” (Oblak, 1890, pp. 138–139).

From 1902 onwards, gramophones and gramophone records were sometimes advertised in Slovenian newspapers (e.g. *Slovenec*, *Slovenski narod*, *Edinost*) which often promoted “international music and singing” at the same time. A detailed review of Slovenian advertisements shows that the earliest Slovenian gramophone recordings appeared in 1902 and later in 1905³; more often and more systematically, however, from the second half of 1908 onwards, when Gramophone Co. records with recordings from Ljubljana first appeared on the market (for more see Kunej D., 2014).

¹ In 1877, Thomas Edison patented and legally protected his device, the so-called phonograph or the talking machine, immediately after inventing it. This was the first device that was able to record and reproduce recorded sound. This caused Emile Berliner to approach his idea of sound recording in a different manner to avoid the existing patents in developing what would become the gramophone in 1888.

² Oblak was a merchant and wanted to become the main representative and retailer of gramophones in the southern part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Oblak, 1890, p. 139). Most probably nothing came out of his grand plan, since no further Oblak’s advertisements for his gramophones can be found in any newspapers.

³ In 1902, the internationally celebrated Slovenian singer Franc Pogačnik-Naval recorded two Slovenian songs in Vienna for the Gramophone Company. The first song, *Pred durmi*, was issued on a single-sided 7” record with matrix number 2345B and catalogue number 72646. The other song, *Ljubici*, had already been recorded on a single-sided 10” matrix (no. 854x) and was sold under catalogue number 72406. The records were also sold in Ljubljana, as evidenced by the advertisement of the watchmaker Rudolf Weber in the newspaper *Slovenski narod*, offering both records in addition to gramophones. (Govori, poje in se smeje, 1902). Later, other Slovenian and foreign artists also occasionally recorded a few Slovenian songs. From newspaper advertisements we learn that at least some of these recordings were also sold on the Slovenian market, but they were not marketed often and systematically. In the autumn of 1905, however, Weber began to advertise records with Slovenian recordings, highlighting them in his advertisement as a special novelty (Novo! 1905).

Slovenian material on early gramophone records, known predominantly as 78 rpm records or shellac records, was being recorded for a good fifty years, from the very first Slovenian recordings in the early 20th century to the end of the era of these gramophone records in the mid-1950s. Although this period can chronologically be divided in various ways, it makes most sense to use the division that is dictated by the development of technology and is also most often used by other researchers, i.e. acoustic recordings (up to circa 1925) and later, electrical recordings. The new technology also brought about significant changes in performance practice, ensemble structure, methodological approach, recording aesthetics, and other areas, all of which is reflected in the recorded material and the marketing of the records. Slovenian recordings could further be divided into two large groups, i.e. according to the location of recording sessions: firstly, recordings made in Ljubljana and other European cities and, secondly, recordings made by Slovenian immigrants in the USA. This division is also based on the recorded material's characteristics, although many recordings were marketed globally and grew beyond ethnic and geographic borders.

Traditional music can frequently be found on the early Slovenian gramophone recordings and there are multiple reasons for this. This paper focuses on early commercial recorded music on gramophone records and analyses the beginnings of commercialisation and popularisation of Slovenian traditional music through new technical advances and the emergence of the gramophone industry. It aims to present the characteristics of this marketable sound medium and the recordings made on it, as well as what such recordings can reveal about the traditional music practices of that period and about the way they were transmitted, changed and marketed. The paper is based on the analysis of a large amount of material collected in the Digital Collection of Gramophone Records (*Digitalna zbirka gramofonskih plošč, DZGP*) at the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU in Ljubljana, which, in addition to the database with more than 2700 units and detailed metadata, 1300 digitised sound samples and about 3000 label scans and other visual material, also contains a rich collection of various written sources, mainly record company catalogues and published newspaper articles and advertisements. For historical background and comparative studies, the information is drawn from a wide range of different literature on the beginnings of the gramophone industry (e.g. *Ethnic Recordings in America 1982*, Spottswood 1990, *Discography of American Historical Recordings (DAHR)*, Kelly, 2000, Sherman, 2010, Gronow, 2014).

The market orientation of gramophone recordings of traditional music

The gramophone record industry dates back to the period of general global industrialisation, which saw the emergence of mass production and consumerism. The growing international trade allowed a global market expansion, whereas legal regulations and patent protection contributed to the emergence

of monopolistic conditions in the market (cf. Gronow, 1982, p. 4). It is essential to understand that gramophones and gramophone records were goods intended to be sold and the aim of the music industry from the very beginning had been to generate profit and increase production. Apart from selling records as such, during the early days of the gramophone industry, the sale of gramophones themselves was also imperative.

Record companies realised very early on that, in order to achieve market expansion, it was necessary for them to issue records in different languages and to offer buyers recordings from a variety of musical cultures. They were aware that in order to sell gramophones and records potential consumers needed to be offered local music, which was familiar to them and which many could identify with (cf. Pennanen, 2007). It is therefore hardly surprising that the recordings that featured Slovenian traditional music were produced by different record companies in Europe and the USA.

In Europe, it was the activities of the Gramophone Co. that played a major role in the beginnings of the music industry in Slovenia. In the early 20th century, Gramophone Co. monopolised the sale of gramophones and gramophone records in Europe (cf. Gronow and Englund, 2007, p. 282) and its recording model and the nature of its business practices set an example for a number of future record companies. In 1907, the Gramophone Co. decided to employ a systematic strategy in order to enter the market in the southern part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Balkans, and had frequent recording sessions in major regional centres of this geographic area. The company's first recording session in Ljubljana took place in 1908 and marked the beginning of a new era of recording and marketing records that featured Slovenian material. This was an important turning point as it encouraged marketing-related activities, which is evident from the advertisements in the newspapers at the time (cf. Kunej D., 2014). Slovenian music on gramophone records was later recorded also by other European record companies and preserved on different labels, such as Gramophone Co., Zonophone, Dacapo, Odeon, Jumbo, Jumbola, Homokord, Favorite, Kalliope, Lyrophon, Parlophon, Pathé etc.

The most comprehensive and systematic ethnic music marketing campaigns were undertaken by American record companies with a view to addressing the wishes of numerous immigrants, who were seen as excellent potential buyers. The companies began recording the so-called "ethnic music" or music for "foreign-speaking" buyers. A large number of such records contain traditional songs and characteristic traditional instruments, which helped the immigrants to keep their memories of the motherland. The expansion of the gramophone industry in the first two decades of the 20th century went hand in hand with a growth in recordings and the sales of records featuring foreign-language recordings. Many articles and texts on the profitability of foreign-speaking records can be found. For instance, in 1928, the Victor company pointed out that "one of the greatest classes of record buyers of the present day is that of foreign-born residents" (Gronow, 1982, p. 34). Slovenian immigrants were, much like immigrants of other nations, potential very good buyers of records. Large record companies decided

to publish catalogues of Slovenian records intended for Slovenian buyers in the Slovenian language.

Information on record labels and the surrounding area

Information about the recordings and performers featured on records, as well as specific information about the recording process and the marketing of records is obtainable from various sources. Basic information, however, is given in the centre of the record, where the label is located, revealing a great deal of information with the name, graphic design, written information and alphanumeric codes.

The centre of the record includes an area where no sound can be recorded for technical reasons. This is the so-called *label area*, where a paper label is adhered with the basic information about the recording. Surrounding the label is a non-grooved area between the end of the final band and the label area, the so-called *run-off groove area*, *end-groove area* or *dead wax*. Additional information is often stamped or inscribed here, typically in the form of alphanumeric codes.

At first glance, the label and the area surrounding it do not reveal a great deal of information about the recording. They mainly contain basic information about the content, i.e. the title of the recording, artist names, and occasionally also the author of the recorded materials. Some of the information included here (the matrix number, the brand, the name and the graphic design of the label, the catalogue number) is seemingly less important for the record's identification and documentation due to a variety of coded forms, and listeners of old records may be less familiar with them or may understand them to a lesser extent. However, these particular items of information convey facts about the recordings, the times during which they were created, how the record is marketed and the target audience the recording is intended for.

Record companies used various and sometimes complex identification systems (e.g. labels, matrix and catalogue numbers), which were partly modified, changed or even completely replaced over time. For this reason, it is often difficult to entirely understand them. If one is familiar with them, it is possible to follow individual reissues of the recorded material and establish whether the same original recordings were used for different reissues. During the course of label trading, the changing of the recordings' ownership and various reissues, the information about the recorded materials on the label of the final product (i.e. the record) may have completely changed, while the matrix number, which identified individual sound recordings, remained unchanged almost without exception.

Records hardly ever include the date and the place of recording sessions or the record pressing. The matrix number can often be helpful in determining the time and the place of a recording session, as it was assigned to the recording when the recording was made. The catalogue number in conjunction with the label and its design can aid in determining when and for what market a record was issued or reissued.

Record label

A label with the name, graphic design and logo is a trademark of the record company that marketed certain sound recordings. Initially, labels contained information about the record trade name (brand) under which record companies offered certain recordings in the market, and at the same time specified the owner of the recording, i.e. the rights holder. Record companies commonly marketed their sound recordings on different labels that were aimed at specific segments of the market and for customer differentiation. They could also use labels to point out the different types (e.g. genres) of recordings and designate the price range, which visually illustrated the prestige of the recorded materials⁴. Record companies also traded in labels and the label-related recording rights, which is why certain labels repeatedly changed hands. Today, label names allow identifying the company that issued a record or the trademark by means of which the publisher categorised and marketed a certain group of records. When it comes to documenting and cataloguing the issued gramophone records, the label name signifies the record publisher (Miliano, 1999).

Matrix number

The matrix number is uniquely associated with the creation (cutting) of a recording. During the era of 78 rpm records, each performance or event could be recorded only as a whole. The tune was performed continuously from beginning to end, as no subsequent corrections or editing of the recorded material was possible. Thus, each recording was an independent sound event, recorded in its entirety and cut onto a master wax disc (the matrix). When it was created, each recording was assigned a unique code that often consisted of alphanumeric characters, which uniquely identified the recording. It was inscribed or stamped into wax on the recorded master disc (the matrix), thus transferring it onto all subsequent pressings. As a rule, it is visible on each pressed record. This code is called the matrix number or the master number. On the record, it is typically printed onto the run-out groove area, i.e. the non-grooved area between the end of the final band on the side of a record and the label. Since a record is allocated a matrix number during its creation, the matrix number is critical for its identification⁵.

Matrix numbers often consist of several elements and may also contain additional recording session-related information, such as the recording method used (either an acoustic or an electrical process) and the recording engineers'

⁴ Thus, the first issues of well-established performers were in a higher price range, while reissues of less acclaimed performers were in a lower price range.

⁵ Record companies initially used matrix numbers as a means of in-company control of the recorded material (e.g. in their registers of recordings, accountancy documents) and record pressings, but the numbers were also helpful in calculating the payment for recording engineers (cf. Kelly, 2000, p. 14).

identification, but may also mark a copy of the original, etc. A special part of the matrix number is the code for individual takes or cuts.

Record companies used different matrix number systems and types, hence the matrix numbers are often difficult to read or to fully understand from individual records, and a good knowledge of the matrix number system of a particular company is needed.

Catalogue number

The catalogue number of a record is an alpha-numeric identification code, assigned by the publisher and owner of the recording to each of the issued records. It was used mainly to control stocks and was a helpful sales tool. The number was also used to advertise records in catalogues and advertising publications. As a rule, catalogue numbers were unique and indicated the record (pressing), as opposed to the matrix numbers, which identified the recording. Catalogue numbers allow us to assume the chronological order of pressing for a given label, however, only within the individual series, categorising various classifications such as the size of the record, type of music, origin of the recording, target market, price range, etc. (cf. Sherman, 2010).

About performers and the recorded traditional music repertoire

Like most other activities within the gramophone industry, the main aim of recording traditional music records was commerce and profit. The fate and success of recordings was decided mainly by the market. Those artists who received a favourable response from the listeners were able to record more often, possibly for various record companies, and commercially successful recordings had several reissues and they consequently also reached a larger circle of listeners and buyers. The choice of performers and the recorded repertoire were influenced by numerous factors.

In the early days of the gramophone industry, especially during the times of the acoustic recording process, the choice of performers and the recorded repertoire were greatly influenced by the technical characteristics and shortcomings of the recording technology available at the time. For instance, the recording equipment enabled a satisfactory sound-recording quality only to solo performers and smaller instrumental and vocal ensembles. What is more, it was necessary to have sufficiently loud and clear sound sources, so it was important to perform music fairly loudly and to choose suitable vocals and musical instruments.

In Europe, the Gramophone Co. approached recording and marketing of records in a very unique way from the very beginning. By establishing subsidiaries, which operated in regions that often corresponded to larger language areas in

Europe, it concentrated on local recording sessions and marketing of the recordings. Thus, it made sure of commercial benefit, having continuous access to new recordings and a variety of performers as well as numerous customers – buyers. Each subsidiary was responsible for its own commercial activities and as a rule it was also given a free hand to choose performers and the repertoire best suited to its region in order to sell the records successfully.

Traditional music can frequently be found on the early gramophone recordings made in Europe. Often, it was performed by opera singers, actors or smaller vocal groups, all of whom had experience in western classical music. As a result, the aesthetics and musical arrangements often followed the rules of western music. An overview of the recorded Slovenian music on these records shows that the recordings very often featured songs that were frequently performed at various cultural events in that period, and which were also a staple of songbooks and traditional singers' repertoires⁶. The songs were fairly simple and were intended to be sung by smaller groups; consequently, the organisation and technological aspects of recording were made easier. It also made more sense commercially to offer well-known and well-established songs, i.e. well-liked songs with recognisable musical content⁷.

In the USA, to cater to the immigrants, record companies first focused on recording national anthems and other well-known songs from Europe, which were recorded with studio orchestral accompaniment. Later, they added recordings of popular songs, as well as traditional songs and tunes played on typical traditional instruments. Therefore, a surprisingly large number of records recorded in the USA for foreign-speaking buyers feature traditional music recordings, which were produced in response to the demand among the immigrants from the rural areas of their respective home countries. Listening to such records helped them remain connected to their native country and its culture.

Slovenian immigrants made recordings for various record companies in the USA and were featured on various labels, including the well-known labels of the Victor Talking Machine Co., Columbia Graphophone Co. and Okeh Records. The recording sessions were held mostly in New York City, Chicago and Cleveland. Companies often used distinct series of catalogue numbers for records that were intended for immigrants in order to increase their market visibility. Such series were at first represented by large blocks of catalogue numbers, reserved for foreign-

⁶ Based on the DZGP material, Mojca Kovačič analysed the recordings of the Glasbena matica Musical Society, which recorded frequently between 1908 and 1911. At that time, the society was the leading institution in Slovenian music education, publishing and performance. These records contain sixty-seven recordings, most of which are folk songs, choral arrangements of folk songs and patriotic songs. She assumed that many of them could be sung by ear, as the interpretation of the songs on these recordings is close to the sonority that is characteristic of traditional folk singing (Kovačič, 2014).

⁷ Urša Šivic examined about 110 folklorised songs from the DZGP that were part of the broader musical environment at both cultural events and folk singing at the time. The analysis revealed that among them the most frequently recorded were: "Kje so moje rožice" [Where Are My Flowers], "Luna sije" [The Moon Is Shining], "Po jezeru bliz' Triglava" [Along the Lake near Mt Triglav], "Prišla bo pomlad" [Spring Will Come], "Otok bleški" [Bled Island], "Na tujih tleh" [On Foreign Ground], "Naprej zastava Slave" [Forward, Flag of Glory] (Šivic, 2014).

language records. However, after 1920, with the growing number of such records, large companies started to mark individual series with prefixes and suffixes. Even a cursory look at Slovenian recordings made in the USA prior to World War II, which are presented in the discography *Ethnic Music on Records* (Spottswood, 1990, pp. 1021–1043), reveals that nearly 600 recordings of Slovenian music were featured on gramophone records during this period. For the most part, these were various arrangements of traditional songs, as well as quite a few traditional dance tunes, played on the accordion or performed by small instrumental ensembles.

Reissues beyond geographic and ethnic borders

Many recordings of Slovenian traditional music seemed to have enjoyed significant popularity, as attested by numerous reissues. Reissues are readily recognisable by various label designs as well as by any changes in the label and/or the company name, identification codes on the label and catalogue numbers. All reissues, however, have the same matrix number – although it may not always be visible – which uniquely identifies a recording and remains unchanged for different reissues.

A case study of Slovenian recordings made by the Germany-based Favorite company in Ljubljana in 1910 reveals that many of these recordings were later reissued in the USA and geared towards Slovenian immigrants. Columbia company in the USA struck a deal with the Lindström company in Europe, which Favorite was part of after 1913, to have access to some material recorded in Europe. At least as early as February 1915, Columbia started issuing records pressed from original Favorite masters in its foreign repertoire catalogues series E6000⁸ (Strötbaum, 2010, pp. 128, 133).



Figure 1. The *Slovenska kmečka godba* (Slovenian Peasants' Band) recorded the traditional dance tune *Marzolin* (varsoviennne) for the Favorite company with matrix number 3287-t and catalogue number 1-72851. The recording was later reissued by Columbia under catalogue number E6058, with the original Favorite matrix and catalogue numbers engraved on the reissued disc (DZGP, 2022)

⁸ In 1908, when Columbia started issuing double-sided discs, they created catalogue series that indicated the type of recording with prefixes in the form of capital letters, i.e. "A" for American recordings and "E" for foreign (Ethnic, often European origin) recordings. The series that is of particular interest to Slovenians is the "E" series, as it includes the first recordings of Slovenian music issued by Columbia. Individual blocks of numbers in this series followed consecutively in a chronological order: block E6000–E6140 indicated recordings on 10-inch records, issued between circa 1915 and circa 1923 (cf. Gronow, 1982, Spottswood, 1990).

Relatively early, the Columbia E6000 catalogue series included a considerable amount of Slovenian material (*Numerical Catalogue of Columbia*, 1919). The preserved records from this series prove that this was often reissued material, which had been recorded in Europe, including the Favorite recordings made in 1910 in Ljubljana. This is clearly seen from the original matrix and the Favorite catalogue numbers engraved into the records next to the Columbia label (cf. Fig. 1). Today, there are only a few Slovenian gramophone recordings made by Favorite in Ljubljana in 1910 available on the original label. Many more have been preserved in a reissued form of the Columbia E6000 series. It seems that the Slovenian immigrants in the USA bought a sufficient number of Slovenian records and took good care of them.

Similarly, many recordings originally made in the USA by Slovenian immigrants were later reissued in Europe. A case study of Hoyer Trio⁹ records made by Columbia in the USA has revealed that a large number of these records were reissued in Europe and were intended for sale on the Slovenian market. This is evidenced by Columbia's Main Catalogue from 1932 (*Glavni katalog Columbia*, 1932), which was printed by Columbia Graphophone Jugoslavensko d. d. in Zagreb. The stamp on the catalogue reveals that the catalogue was distributed by the Tehnik store, which was located at 20 Miklošič Street (Miklošičeva cesta 20) in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The records from the catalogue, including records by the Hoyer Trio, were readily available in Ljubljana (cf. Fig. 2). They were pressed in England and, therefore, the records' catalogue numbers differ from the numbers of the USA-based Columbia and correspond to the numbers of Columbia based in the UK. Columbia's Main Catalogue, printed in 1932 in Zagreb, contains reissued records of almost all of the recordings made for Columbia USA by the Hoyer Trio (cf. DZGP, 2022).



Figure 2. The Šuster Polka (shoemaker polka), recorded in December 1926 by a member of the Hoyer Trio for the Columbia label in New York (USA), was reissued in Europe for the Slovenian market (DZGP, 2022)

⁹The Hoyer Trio was a family ensemble from Cleveland, Ohio, and performed on a regular basis in the period between 1920 and 1930. They played mostly at weddings and parties held by Slovenians, as well as immigrants from other Slavic countries, achieving great popularity. The trio started recording gramophone records in 1924. Their records were immensely popular with listeners and very successful, selling in large numbers (cf. Bricel, 1957, DAHR, 2022). They were the first Slovenian polka band and their style of playing and popularity, directly or indirectly, influenced almost all later musicians who played Slovenian Cleveland-style polka music in the USA.

The other two leading record companies from Europe (the London-based Gramophone Co.) and the USA (Victor) also did business and worked together on market expansion. Very early on, they made a close and long-term cooperative business arrangement. The two companies cooperated both in the development of technology and in the exchange of recorded material. The exchange of recordings, and thus also the expansion of the sales markets of both companies, was of mutual benefit. The records issued by the Gramophone Co. also include Slovenian recordings produced by Victor, including recordings that were recorded in collaboration with members of the Hoyer Trio.

Record companies assessed that some Slovenian traditional music was sufficiently interesting and appealing to immigrants of other nationalities. An analysis of the reissues of Hoyer Trio recordings shows that some of the trio's recordings were issued with a translated title or under a different title, and often also with a different artist name (pseudonym), as the record companies' aim was to target non-Slovenian buyers and expand the product market. These records have the same matrix numbers, but different catalogue numbers than the Slovenian issues, as they were offered to a different target audience. Titles in foreign languages and catalogue numbers that reveal what ethnic groups and what markets the records targeted (cf. Gronow, 1982, pp. 32–44, Spottswood, 1990, pp. xxxiii–xlvi) indicate a wide diversity of target audiences. In the case of Hoyer Trio recordings, seven recordings, which were issued by Columbia, were later reissued for the Czech-speaking and Croatian- (or Serbo-Croatian-) speaking buyers. Two recordings issued by Victor were intended for immigrants from Lithuania. The Okeh label reveals an even greater diversity in the target market for the Hoyer Trio recordings, as six recordings were reissued for Polish, Lithuanian, Italian and even Mexican listeners (cf. DZGP, 2022).

To Slovenian buyers, music by artists of other nationalities was marketed in a similar way. In this case, the information on the labels of reissued records has also often been changed and adapted for the Slovenian market, and it takes a more detailed analysis to establish what recording and performer is actually on the record.

An example of such recordings is a recording on a Columbia record, issued in the USA, which has the matrix number 67095 and the catalogue number E1631. According to the record label, the title of the recording is *Veseljaška polka* (*A Merry Polka*) and the performers are *Slovenska kmečka godba* (*Slovenian Peasants' Band*), with an added note that this is Slovenian (“Carniolan”) material and dance music. The catalogue number prefix (E) indicates that the record was marketed as part of the so-called *general ethnic* series, which often featured recordings made in Europe. The specified details and the relatively low catalogue number (1631) suggest that this is a fairly early recording of Slovenian traditional music recorded in Europe. It was marketed by Columbia in the USA and was issued around the time of World War I, as records from the block of catalogue numbers E1–E4999 were issued between 1908 and 1920. The information about the listed performers suggests that this may be one of the recordings by *Slovenska kmečka godba* (*Slovenian Peasants' Band*), which often recorded music in Ljubljana between 1908 and 1911 for various gramophone companies, including Gramophone Co. and Favorite (cf. DZGP, 2022)

An interesting fact about the recording, however, is revealed by the matrix number¹⁰. It reveals that this matrix number (67095) belongs to a recording from Austria. Based on the information from record collectors and other sources, it is clear that the original title of the recording is *Frohsinn Polka (A Merry Polka)* performed by *Wiener Kapelle (Viennese Ensemble)* and that it had already been issued on a Columbia record with the catalogue number E1444 (cf. F. Lechleitner, personal communication, September 20, 2012). Clearly, this is not a recording of Slovenian performers and music, but only a reissued foreign recording targeted at Slovenian buyers; the title of the song and the name of the performers were obviously translated and adapted to make them more appealing to the target audience.

The impact of gramophone records on traditional music practices

The use of sound media resulted in music no longer being limited to a specific place and time and no longer being tied directly to live performances; it was now possible to listen to music even without attending a musical event. With the help of sound media, music reached a wider circle of listeners and crossed geographical distances faster than before. In addition, listeners could listen to it in the company of other people or alone, and independently of the performance context.

During the early period of the music industry, not everyone could afford a gramophone and gramophone records; however, they were often part of various public spaces. In the territory of the present-day Slovenia, between the interwar period and also after World War II, gramophones and radios were often an integral part of inns, where the patrons listened to music together. Music was also often intended for dancing, thus replacing live music and musicians. Innkeepers were among the first and very important buyers of gramophones and gramophone records – and radios at a later time – as they only needed to pay for them once, but could listen to them multiple times, as opposed to musicians, who had to be paid for each individual performance. The arrival of sound media thus limited the musicians' opportunities for live performances, as illustrated by the following statement published in the newspaper *Radio Ljubljana: Tednik za radiofonijo* in 1933:

Before Shrove Tuesday, our radio station received loads of requests from local innkeepers, asking the station to play plenty of dance music during Shrovetide, and especially on Shrove Tuesday; the crisis is quite obvious in that everyone wants to save on the cost of musicians. But what will the musicians have to say about this? (*Znamenje časa...*, 1933, p. 122).

Although traditional dancing was mainly done to the accompaniment of live music, it is safe to assume that Slovenians also danced traditional dances

¹⁰ During the acoustic recording era, Columbia had a rather disorganised and, due to the lack of preserved documentation, insufficiently explained matrix number system. Matrix numbers were used in the form of large blocks of numbers and in different periods of time, and the matrix marks alone do not allow making any convincing conclusions. However, a comparative analysis can be helpful in discovering recording-related information.

to the sounds of gramophones (cf. Kunej R., 2014), as indicated by various references. In fact, many record catalogues have special sections marketing “dance music”. These sections often include traditional dance tunes¹¹. It is also interesting to note that already during the first recording session in Ljubljana in 1908, some traditional dance tunes performed by the *Slovenska kmečka godba* (*Slovenian Peasants’ Band*) ensemble were recorded (Največja tvirka, 1908) (cf. Fig. 3), followed by some more tunes by the same performers recorded during subsequent recording sessions (cf. Kunej D., 2012).

Gramophone recordings intended for dancing are even more often mentioned in Slovenian newspapers in the USA. In several advertisements, gramophone records are touted as a replacement for musicians, for example: “Gramophones are perfect for parties. And much like musicians, they can serve you well at any party you throw at home” (Gramofoni, 1924, p. 3). In one of his adverts in the weekly *Ameriška domovina*, A. Mervar, a Cleveland-based music store owner, advertised Slovenian records with the slogan “Latest Slovenian Records for Singing and Dancing”, while also visually emphasising the content of the records with an illustration showing two dancing couples and musicians (Latest Slovenian Records, 1939, p. 4). In their catalogues published for Slovenian-speaking listeners, major record companies from the USA tried to appeal to record buyers by mentioning the recordings of dance music: “The songs you sang, the music you danced to, all these are sung or played for you by the very best and most popular artists, your fellow countrymen” (*Victorjevi Recordi v Sloveščini*, 1925, p. 1).

Listening to the early sound media – mainly gramophone records, and to some extent the radio¹² – was the first time listeners were able to listen to the same music repeatedly. This also made it easier for singers and musicians to learn songs and instrumental tunes, as well as to internalise them, since repetition is an essential part of memorisation. Moreover, greater imitation of the recorded



Figure 3. Traditional dance tune *Domači traplan* (lokal polka tremblante) recorded by the *Slovenska kmečka godba* (*Slovenian Peasants’ Band*) ensemble during the first recording session in Ljubljana in 1908 (DZGP, 2022)

¹¹ For example, the 1930 catalogue of A. Rasberger, an important Ljubljana-based gramophone and record dealer, includes several Slovenian folk dances, such as “Povštrov ples” (pillow dance), “Kmečki tramblan” (peasant polka tremblante), “Treplan” (polka tremblante), “Mazulinka” (varsoviene), “Sedem korak” (seven-step dance), “Šušter polka” (shoemaker polka) (*Seznam slovenskih*, 1930).

¹² Radio Ljubljana regularly played 78 rpm gramophone records, as well as music requested by the listeners.

material resulted in fewer differences between traditional music practices, which became more uniform and fixed. However, this did not completely eliminate the characteristic variety of traditional music, as the transmission by means of recordings is still imperfect, depending mainly on the performers' memory, skills and adaptation. In any case, the performers started to draw inspiration from the music they became familiar with through the sound media, and they also made sure their repertoires included new songs and stylistic features heard on the recordings.

Research into how traditional music was transmitted has revealed that folk musicians learned their repertoire from different sources. The fact that gramophone recordings were one of the sources for the transmission of the musical practice, repertoire and dance music, especially during the post-WWII period, is evident from the information shared by informants during field research. For instance, field notes (GNI TZ 16, n. d., p. 137) reveal that a folk musician (born in 1907) learned many tunes he played on the accordion from other "old musicians", and some also from gramophone records. Another musician also taught himself to play the accordion as a child and formed his repertoire mainly by observing his father, a folk musician who played the accordion. In addition, he also used gramophone records, i.e. in the mornings, even before going to school, he often played records¹³ on the home gramophone and learnt how to play the accordion by ear, thus expanding his repertoire (cf. Jeram, 2021, p. 66). An older woman recalled that in her youth (shortly after World War II), people often listened to gramophone together and on Saturday evenings they also danced to the music from gramophone records at an inn (Mele, 2011, p. 28).

Gramophone records and radio also contributed greatly to the development of new popular-music genres, e.g. polka music in the USA and pop-folk music (*narodnozabavnaglasba*) in Slovenia. Both genres originated from traditional music practices, however, they started introducing some new features (e.g. vocal-instrumental ensembles), establishing the dominance of certain musical instruments (e.g. the accordions), standardising instrumental ensembles and creating a unique aesthetic image. These popular-music genres eventually took over the function and space that had previously been occupied by traditional music (cf. Turk, 2021). The beginnings and development of these popular-music genres are well documented precisely on gramophone records, which thus provide an insight into the gradual transition of traditional music practices into popular music and inclusion in the music industry.

Conclusion

From the very beginning, the advent of sound media and the development of the music industry were decisively influenced by various commercial factors. Like most other activities in the gramophone industry, the recording of

¹³ Apart from newer records with various pop-folk performers, his collection consists of old 78 rpm gramophone records (Jeram, 2021, p. 66).

traditional music records was primarily aimed at commerce and profit. The fate and success of recordings was thus decided first and foremost by the market. Due to the characteristics of the mass medium, the traditional music recorded on gramophone records moved outside its traditional and local bounds, becoming part of the culture industry and marketing. Thus, it was also able to go beyond its geographical and ethnic boundaries and was offered to a different, often international, target audience.

Until a few years ago, Slovenian folklore studies and ethnomusicology did not consider the sound recordings of Slovenian traditional music on early gramophone records to be a scientific source that could be used to research what Slovenian traditional music was like in the past and the way it changed. One of the reasons for this was probably technical in nature, since the obsolescence of the sound carrier and the dominance of modern sound formats meant that the recorded content from old records was not only difficult to access, but people also often did not know about it. Part of the reason, however, lies in the fact that although these gramophone records are old sound carriers that preserve the musical heritage of the first half of the 20th century, they are part of the mass and popular culture and were thus seemingly incompatible with the research of traditional culture, which was based mainly on field research and field sound recordings (cf. Kunej R., 2013).

The previously conducted folkloristic, ethnomusicological, ethnochoreological and other studies (cf. *Traditiones*, 2014), based mainly on the analyses of the material included in the Digital Gramophone Record Collection, have shown that in some cases the sound material on the early gramophone records could actually be a more telling source for the actual musical practices than the sound materials recorded by researchers in the decades since the 1950s. At the very least, it can be considered an excellent comparative resource and can help to shed new light on various aspects of traditional music. On the one hand, gramophone recordings offer important insights into the sonority of the past period, raise questions about the relationship between traditional and composed music, give an idea of former favoured music practices and individual tunes, and present the sound of instrumental traditional dance music during a period when no other sound sources were available yet. On the other hand, they reveal that folk tradition was adapted, popularised and transmitted for different types of audiences, raise the question of commercialism and its influence on the further development of traditional musical creativity and popularisation. In connection with wider social and historical developments, recordings reflect both individual decisions and the directions and strategies adopted by record companies when it came to recording traditional music material, as well as shed light on the early days of the marketing of (Slovenian) recorded music and contribution of the recordings to the development of new popular-music genres.

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