

Early Slovenian Gramophone Records and Their Popularity

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INTRODUCTION

A new technology of sound recording and reproduction was developed at the end of the 19th century using the gramophone, which soon monopolised the market and replaced the phonograph and wax cylinders. At the beginning of the 20th century, gramophone discs with previously recorded music prevailed, resulting in a substantial impact on the performance and consumption of music.

From its very beginning, the appearance and growth of the recorded music industry were mainly a result of various commercial aspirations. The early period of sound recording and reproduction, and the associated growth of the music industry, was predominantly marked by a battle for patents and market dominance. Thomas Edison, whose device was the first to be able to record and play back

recorded sound, patented and thus legally protected his device, which he called the phonograph, immediately after inventing it in 1877. This caused Emile Berliner to approach his idea of sound recording in different manner to avoid the existing patents, in developing what would become the gramophone in 1888. Instead of the wax cylinders which were used to record sounds by the phonograph, he opted for a disc as the medium and used lateral sound inscription in a groove, as opposed to the vertical, “hill-and-dale” inscription used in Edison’s phonograph. Both of these important characteristics that separate gramophones from phonographs later played a crucial role in securing the dominance of the gramophone and its discs. Due to their recording method, gramophone recordings were much simpler to produce than phonograph recordings, and therefore the reproduction devices could be produced and sold at lower price, while pressing and copying records was much less costly than copying cylinders. Berliner soon licensed his process to mass-produce gramophone records to other companies that produced commercial records, effectively resulting in their mass production and the growth of the music industry. The companies soon began competing on the market, which often caused the smaller ones to go bankrupt or to be acquired by larger competitors (cf. Burt 1963; Lechleitner 2004).

Gramophone companies realised very early on that in order to sell gramophones and records, they needed to offer the consumers their local music, which was familiar to them and which they could easily identify with. The performers and repertoire were selected on the basis of various factors. In Europe, the most telling example is that of the Gramophone Company, which approached marketing in a unique way. Very early on, the company opened subsidiaries which often covered large language groups in Europe and were responsible for local recordings and marketing. Through this approach they gained a commercial advantage based on a continuous supply of new recordings, engaging a variety of performers, and attracting large numbers of buyers. The gramophone companies in the United States approached their marketing of foreign-language and folk-music recordings in the most comprehensive and systematic way. These recordings were aimed at immigrant groups, which were considered excellent consumers. Special sales catalogues with series labelled *ethnic music* or *foreign speaking* promoted records in various immigrant groups’ native languages (cf. Gronow 1982).

This paper introduces Slovenian material on 78 rpm gramophone discs, recorded in the earliest period of recordings up to the beginning of the Second World War, and specifically analyses the

popularity of these early recorded songs and tunes among listeners and gramophone companies. For the purpose of this analysis, a vast and detailed database of gramophone recordings from the period was created, based on extensive archive research and material collection at various locations. The search for the recordings was carried out in cooperation with a wide network of Slovenian and international institutions and individuals (collectors, experts and researchers). The research took place between 2009 and 2012 as part of the research project “Sound Material from Gramophone Records as a Source for Ethnomusicology and Folklore Research” at the Institute of Ethnomusicology of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU).

The database contains over 2,650 documented discography units, approximately 1,250 digital copies of sound recordings, and almost 3,000 digital units of visual material. The sheer volume of the material collected has exceeded all expectations, and now represents the basis of the Digital Collection of Gramophone Records at the Institute of Ethnomusicology (GNI DZGP). This material testifies to the existence of a relatively large number of gramophone records with Slovenian (folk) music recorded before the Second World War. It represents an important cultural heritage. The material preserved in electronic form can provide a basis for various studies, while allowing easy access to the content.

Slovenian material on old gramophone records, known predominantly as 78 rpm records or shellac records, can be chronologically classified in several ways. However, it makes sense to focus on a division into two periods based on the developments in recording technology: initially, recordings were made acoustically, and after the 1920s, recordings were made using electricity. The first period lasted from the time of the earliest recordings to around 1925. During this period, recordings were made without the benefit of electronic amplification, and the sound quality (fidelity) was rather inferior by later standards. The sound from some instruments, such as violins, could not be picked up accurately unless the instruments were modified to concentrate the sound. Furthermore, it was very difficult to record larger groups of performers because only a limited number of musicians could be located close to the horns. As a result, the majority of the early Slovenian singers were accompanied by just one or a few instruments, and only small instrumental groups were recorded. The second period began circa 1925, when the so-called “electrical process” for cutting gramophone discs was introduced (cf. Lechleitner 2004). This recording process featured the use of microphones, electronic amplification, and electromagnetic recording heads.

The result was a great improvement in fidelity over the acoustic process, and the capability to record larger orchestras. 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, 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 US. This division is also based on the recorded material's characteristics, although many recordings were marketed globally and grew beyond ethnic and geographic borders.

THE EARLY SLOVENIAN GRAMOPHONE RECORDS

The first gramophone recordings of Slovenian music were made shortly after the new technology was introduced. However, these recordings did not attract much attention on the Slovenian market.

Slovenians were aware of the possibilities of recording and sound reproduction early on, as can be seen from various newspaper articles. One of the earliest published articles in Slovenia that relates to gramophones can be found as early as 1890, soon after the gramophone first appeared on the market. In the newspaper *Dolenjske novice*, Alfons Oblak published a rather comprehensive article titled 'Fonograf, grafefon in gramofon' ('Phonograph, Graphophone and Gramophone'). Basing his article on the World's Fair in Paris in 1889, he included a brief description of the operation and history of the devices and added his thoughts about the possibilities arising from the new technical developments. An editorial note reveals that Oblak, who was a merchant, wanted to become the main representative and retailer of gramophones in this part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Oblak 1890: 139). Most probably, nothing came of this grand plan of his, since no further advertisements by Oblak for his gramophones can be found in the newspapers.

Although different gramophone companies produced recordings with Slovenian content before the First World War,¹ it was the

1 Slovenian recordings from the period have been preserved on various labels, such as Gramophone Co., Zonophone, Dacapo, Odeon, Jumbo, Jumbola, Homokord, Favorite, Kalliope, Lyraphon, Parlophon, Pathé and others.

Gramophone Company that played a major role in the beginnings of the music industry in Slovenia. During the early years of the 20th century, the Gramophone Co. monopolised the sales of gramophones and records in Europe (cf. Gronow and Englund 2007: 282). In addition, the company's model of recording and the nature of its business practices set an example for future recording companies. The Gramophone Co. recordings are therefore highly important to the European context and especially for the understanding of the beginnings of the music industry in the Slavic countries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Balkans. It is no coincidence that the first recordings of Slovenian music were made by the Gramophone Company.²

At the turn of the century, when gramophones and gramophone records were gaining worldwide popularity, news about the new technology was becoming more common in Slovenian newspapers as well. In 1900 the newspaper *Slovenec* published a report about a lecture in Ljubljana on reproduction from "a gramophone, which was kindly made available by local retailer Mr. Fran Čuden" (Slovenec, 9. 11. 1900, p. 3). The article does not say whether Mr. Čuden was selling gramophones or if he merely lent his own gramophone for the purpose of the lecture. Listening to gramophone records, also at public events, became increasingly frequent in the following years, as is shown by various newspaper reports.

2 The founding of the Gramophone Company in London is closely connected with Emil (later Emile) Berliner, the inventor of the gramophone and owner of patents for the gramophone and gramophone record production. Berliner, who was a successful businessman in the United States (most notably with the U.S. Gramophone Company and the Berliner Gramophone Company), wanted to expand to Europe. In May 1898, the Berliner Gramophone Company (soon renamed the Gramophone Company) was founded in London and held exclusive rights to sell gramophone records in Europe. The company first marketed only American products, however by agreement with Berliner it also set up a recording studio in London. In the summer of 1898, Frederick (Fred) William Gaisberg, a recording expert from the United States, arrived in London and the first recording sessions in Europe soon took place. In December of the same year, a subsidiary for the pressing of gramophone records, Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft, was set up in Hannover, Germany, where Berliner's brother owned a telephone factory. In 1899, the Gramophone Co. started establishing outlets and subsidiaries in larger European cities. That same year the company also bought the original picture of a dog listening to a gramophone and named it His Master's Voice. The picture soon became the logo of the Victor Talking Machine Company in the USA, which had close ties to the Gramophone Co. in the UK. Approximately a decade later, circa 1910, the Gramophone Co. adopted the picture as its logo, which replaced the earlier "Recording Angel" logo, which featured an angel writing on a gramophone record with a feather. The company also began production of typewriters in December 1900, and later electric clocks, and changed its name to the Gramophone and Typewriter Company (G&T). The new products did not turn out to be very successful, and hence, in 1907, the company changed its name back to the Gramophone Company, which was kept until 1931, when it merged with Columbia, creating Electric & Musical Industries (EMI). For more details about the history of the Gramophone Co. see Sherman 2010; Friedman s.a.

From 1902 onwards, gramophones and gramophone records were being systematically advertised in Slovenian newspapers, which often advertised “international music and singing” at the same time (cf. Kunej D. 2014). However, the advertisements at the turn of the century did not yet include Slovenian recordings.

The sole exception is the recordings of two songs made in Vienna for the Gramophone Co. in 1902 by the internationally acclaimed Slovenian singer Franc Pogačnik, a.k.a. “Naval” (cf. Kelly 2009). According to the current knowledge, these are the oldest available recordings of Slovenian music on gramophone discs. Both songs, ‘Pred durmi’ (‘At the Door’) and ‘Ljubici’ (‘To My Lover’), were released on single-sided records, which were still being printed at that time. They are listed with their German titles as well and are listed as being ‘Slovenian traditional’ songs, although they were most probably merely composed on the basis of material from the Slovenian folk tradition. These recordings very soon found their way to the Slovenian audience. In those times, listening to gramophone records was often part of the programme at various cultural events, as attested by the following article in the current events section of the newspaper *Slovenec*. “Quite charming pieces emanated from the gramophone with a solo performance by our own Naval ringing out as the most delightful of all” (*Slovenec*, 7. 3. 1902, p. 3). Proof that these two records were also on sale in Ljubljana comes in the form of an advertisement in the newspaper *Slovenski narod*, in which clockmaker Rudolf Weber offers “A magnificent selection of discs from hard rubber, including Slovenian discs, performed by court opera singer Fran Naval-Pogačnik” (*Slovenski narod*, 2. 7. 1902, p. 6). However, these first Slovenian records were not in any way emphasised in the advertisement, and were soon thereafter taken out of its wording.

In the autumn of 1905, Rudolf Weber began advertising Slovenian gramophone records again, but this time he paid special attention to them by emphasising and labelling them as a special novelty. *Slovenski narod* ran an advertisement, announcing:

New! From today on, Slovenian records for gramophone, excellent singing on the recordings, are available [...] clockmaker Rudolf Weber. (*Slovenski narod*, 28. 10. 1905, p. 10)

The news about Slovenian recordings was highlighted in bold letters using a special font. This advertisement was repeated in the newspaper several times over the next few days. A somewhat later advertisement, meanwhile, also listed the titles of records in Slovenian:

Male performers: 'Naprej zastava slave' ('Forward, Flag of Glory!') – 'U boj' ('Into Battle') – 'Slovenske pesmi' ('Slovenian Songs') – 'Al' me boš kaj rada imela' ('Will You Love Me Just a Bit?') – 'Zagorski zvonovi' ('Mountain Bells') – 'Kje so moje rožice' ('Where Have My Flowers Gone'). (Slovenski narod, 9. 11. 1905, p. 6)

New Slovenian records for sale, moreover, included instrumental songs performed by a tambourine band: "'Sokolska koračnica' ('Falcon March') – 'Liepa naša domovina' ('Our Beautiful Homeland')". Based on the newspaper articles, it can be assumed that these Slovenian recordings were made for the Gramophone Co. in around the first half of 1905. However, Weber closed his shop in 1906, and in the second half of 1906 and throughout 1907 there was no systematic advertising of gramophones or gramophone records and no mention of Slovenian recordings.

A review of Slovenian advertisements shows that some of Slovenian gramophone recordings first appeared in 1902 and later in 1905, but more often and more systematically from the second half of 1908 onwards, when Gramophone Company records with recordings from Ljubljana first appeared on the market (Kunej D. 2014).

SLOVENIAN RECORDS MADE IN LJUBLJANA

The big turning point in advertising gramophone records in Slovenia occurred in 1908, when clockmaker Fran P. Zajec of Ljubljana placed an advertisement in *Slovenski narod*. The advertisement announced a large stock of gramophones and records, including Slovenian material. Not long after that, he published an article in the newspaper profiling Slovenian performers and advertising a selection of recordings by each of these performers. At the beginning of December 1908, he also published an advertisement with an extensive list of performers and recordings. This advertisement provided, for the first time, a detailed list of Slovenian recordings published on Zonophone records in 1908, which had clearly been recorded before the summer of that year. The Zonophone logo with the new trademark of the Gramophone Co. (the famous illustration of a dog listening to "his master's voice") can be clearly seen at the top of the advertisement. Apparently Zajec obtained a license through an Austrian company to sell Gramophone Co. products in Slovenia, because Gramophone Co. used its numerous subsidiaries to market its records on various labels, which included the Zonophone label. In the weeks leading up to Christmas 1908,

many other merchants also published advertisements selling gramophones and records and many also highlighted new Slovenian recordings. Looking at the newspaper advertisements, it can be concluded that the systematic and frequent advertising of Slovenian recordings on gramophone records began in the second half of 1908, when new Gramophone Co. recordings appeared in the Slovenian market with recordings from Ljubljana.

Until recently, recordings of Slovenian music made in Ljubljana by a few gramophone companies before the First World War had been almost entirely overlooked. The reason for this could be that many of the earliest gramophone recordings were made in larger European capitals, e.g. Vienna, Berlin and Budapest, where recording venues were located in hotels or halls (and later also in recording studios), and where performers were invited for recording sessions. This method of recording was financially more efficient, as it was cheaper to invite performers to recording venues in major cities than to transport large, heavy and cumbersome equipment to performers. Nevertheless, some companies recorded outside the major recording centres, as this allowed them to record a more varied programme with diverse performers who were local and thus better known and more popular with the local audience. Thus, the companies secured the local market for the sales of their records and gramophones (cf. Pennanen 2007). Recording experts from various companies often brought their recording equipment to important regional centres, where they used larger hotels or suitable local halls to set up impromptu recording studios. For Slovenian recordings, these included mainly Zagreb and Ljubljana. The company that did the most recording across Europe and worldwide was the Gramophone Co., with its headquarters in Britain and with many subsidiaries in different European countries.

In 1907, the Gramophone Co. apparently began a systematic strategy to enter the market in the southern part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Balkans. This year marks the beginning of frequent recording sessions in the larger regional centres of this geographical area. Two recording experts, brothers Franz and Max Hampe from Berlin, were responsible for the recording. They were employed by the Berlin subsidiary and mostly recorded in central, south-eastern and eastern Europe (cf. Kelly 1995, 2000, 2009; Pennanen 2007).

The first extensive recording sessions in the southern part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Balkans were made in 1907 by Franz Hampe. In the spring of 1907, Hampe first went to Lvov, followed by Budapest, Zagreb, Sarajevo and Belgrade, from where he returned to Berlin. In 1908, his brother Max Hampe (1877–1957)

began recording in the same region. Judging from the matrix numbers, he started recording in Budapest and continued in Zagreb, Sarajevo, Ljubljana, Shkodër (Albania) and Montenegro. Whether the cities followed in this very order, as suggested by the matrix numbers, cannot be fully determined, as it has often turned out that the running order of the matrix numbers cannot be entirely relied upon. Still, it can be said with confidence that the recordings from this trip were made before the summer in 1908, which can be proved by the advertisements in Slovenian newspapers, which started to advertise the Slovenian records from this trip from early July onwards (cf. Kunej D. 2014). Max Hampe made recordings in Ljubljana again in the spring of 1909 (during his trip from Berlin to Budapest, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Graz, Prague, Vienna, Frankfurt etc.), and in the summer of 1910 (Berlin, Prague, Genoa, Lausanne, Ljubljana, Vienna, Berlin) (cf. Kelly 1995, 2000). Between 1907 and 1910, Max Hampe recorded in Ljubljana three times. Based on the matrix numbers, it can be estimated that he made about 160 recordings during this period.

The recording sessions of the Gramophone Company that took place in Ljubljana in 1908 represent a significant turning point in the recording of records with Slovenian material because they set an example later followed by other gramophone companies. At the end of that year, the first Slovenian recordings by Dacapo, a company from Berlin, were made, and published by the same label a short time later. In the following years, the company Favorite also made recordings in Ljubljana. Various sources make it possible to conclude that recording experts from the most important European gramophone companies did record in Ljubljana, some of them more than once. A lot of these records were later reissued and made available on the European as well as the American markets.

From the preserved recordings, catalogues, and other lists and data sources, it can be concluded that Slovenian music was also recorded in Zagreb (Croatia), Vienna (Austria), Berlin (Germany) and other European places where numerous Slovenian artists were present. Slovenian music was also recorded by musicians from other (Slavic) nations (cf. Edison Bell Penkala 1927; Rasberger 1930; Staklarić 1997).

It is therefore not surprising that the merchant Fran P. Zajec soon considerably expanded his inventory of gramophone records and gramophones. In an advertisement from the middle of 1910, he boasted the largest stock of gramophones and gramophone records in Slovenia and informed the public that a price list for Slovenian records including over 400 recordings could be obtained from him. Although

some of the material he offered was probably only “adapted” for Slovenian consumers and merely seemed to include recordings of Slovenian origin, this is still a surprising number of records with Slovenian material, especially because they had appeared on the Slovenian market over a fairly short period of two years.

RECORDINGS BY SLOVENIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA

The sale of records featuring music performed by immigrants presented an important marketing opportunity for American record companies. Because so many immigrants, mainly from the Old World, had found their new home in the USA, the music industry started seeing them as potential buyers and began recording so-called ethnic music or music for foreign-speaking buyers. A large number of such records contained popular and folk songs and characteristic instruments, which helped the immigrants to keep their memories of the motherland.

Slovenian immigrants to the United States represented a good market for gramophone records. As they had done for immigrants from other countries, the large record companies produced Slovenian-language catalogues of records by Slovenian performers for Slovenian listeners. In doing so, they were largely counting on immigrants’ nostalgia for their homeland and hoping that this would increase record and gramophone sales. For example, the 1925 catalogue *Victorjevi Recordi v Slovenščini* (*Victor Records in Slovenian*), which especially emphasised that it contained all of the Slovenian records issued by the company up to January 1925, started out by stating:

With the help of Victor, you can hear the music of your native land and enjoy the best and most beautiful sounds of the land where you were born. Refresh your memories of the distant days of your youth in a far-off homeland. The songs that you sang and the music that you danced to is sung and played here by the best and most popular artists, your fellow countrymen. (Victorjevi Recordi 1925: 1)

Slovenian artists made recordings for various gramophone companies, including all three then leading USA record labels: the Victor Talking Machine Co., Columbia Graphophone Co. and Okeh Records. The sessions were mostly recorded in New York, Chicago and Cleveland.

American record companies undertook the most comprehensive and systematic ethnic music marketing campaigns, with a view

to addressing the needs of numerous immigrants who were excellent buyers of gramophone records. Adverts which offered gramophone records with Slovenian recordings can be found in several newspapers, especially *Ameriška domovina* (*American Home*) and *Amerikanski Slovenec* (*American Slovenian*). 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-language records. However, after 1920, with the growing number of such records, large companies started to mark individual series with prefixes and suffixes.

The Victor, Columbia and Okeh companies, the leading gramophone publishers of foreign-language records in the USA, attached specific catalogue numbers to Slovenian records as well. In 1929, while updating its catalogue numbering system, Victor introduced the prefix “V” and allocated a block of numbers to each ethnic group. The numbers also differed for different-size records. Slovenians received the block starting with V-23000 for 10-inch records and V-73000 for 12-inch records. In a similar vein, from 1908 onwards, when it started marketing double-sided records, Columbia used the prefix “E” for “European” or foreign-language records, which includes Columbia’s first Slovenian records. Due to changes in the disc manufacturing system, in 1923 the company replaced the catalogue numbering system and substituted the prefix E with the suffix “F” (*foreign*). Slovenian records were allocated the numbers between 25000-F and 26000-F for 10-inch records and 68000-F and 69000-F for 12-inch discs. In 1921, the Okeh Phonograph Co. began mass publishing foreign-language records on 10-inch discs, and usually sold the records made in the US under the Okeh label and licensed European records under the Odeon label. It was also then that it started using various blocks of catalogue numbers, with which it marked records for individual ethnic groups or target audiences. Based on catalogues for foreign-language records from 1923, 1926 and 1928, Pekka Gronow and Richard Spottswood state that Slovenian recordings were allocated the numbers between 24001 and 25000 (Gronow 1982: 41; Spottswood 1990: xi).

A glance at catalogues of records made in the USA prior to the beginning of the Second World War shows that almost 600 gramophone records of Slovenian music in the USA had been published by then (cf. Spottswood 1990). These mainly include various arrangements of folk songs, as well as a fair share of folk tunes performed on the accordion or by smaller bands. Many of these recordings were

reissued in Europe and sold on the Slovenian market (cf. Glavni katalog Columbia 1932; Rasberger 1930). Early songs, recorded in the period between the mid- to late 1910s, often reflected a longing for the native country and the family left behind, as well as impressions of the new homeland. But many well-known Slovenian folk songs were also recorded. From 1923 onwards, both the number of recordings and the variety of performers increased. In 1924, 1925, and 1926, there were 40 to 50 compositions recorded per year, and in 1927, 1928, and 1929, between 80 and 105 per year. In 1930 and 1931, the number of recordings fell back to around 40 per year, and then from 1932 onwards recordings almost completely tapered off.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND POPULARITY OF EARLY SLOVENIAN GRAMOPHONE RECORDS

When analysing the recorded material and the selection of performers on gramophone records, it is necessary to take into account various factors which affect this selection. 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 has been to generate profits and increase production. The Gramophone Co. approached marketing in a very unique way from the very beginning. By establishing subsidiaries that operated in regions which often corresponded to larger language areas in Europe, it concentrated on local recording sessions and marketing of the recordings. Each subsidiary was responsible for its own commercial activities and as a rule it also decided independently about the choice of performers and the repertoire appropriate to its region in order to successfully sell the records and gramophones.

Risto Pekka Pennanen (2007) confidently assumes that the Gramophone Co. had a clear recording and marketing strategy in the geographical area of the southern Slavic nations and the Balkans. However, due to the nationally, politically, culturally and religiously varied territory, it was not economically feasible, or even possible, to record all types of performances in different places. On the other hand, the similarities between the languages made it possible to market some music genres beyond the national, language, cultural and geographic borders. It also did not make sense to record western classical music locally, as it was easy to market the recordings that were made in European capitals.

In the early days of the gramophone industry, the recording techniques determined the selection of performers and the recorded material. Technical weaknesses made it difficult to convincingly record anything other than solo voices, smaller vocal and instrumental groups and modified brass band ensembles (cf. Kunej D. 2008, 2014). An analysis of Slovenian choir music recordings from that period shows that for instance the Glasbena matica choir appears in considerably smaller numbers. Apparently, based on the number of recordings, a quartet from the Glasbena matica was much more suitable for recording (cf. Kovačič 2014).

As with the majority of activities in the gramophone industry, records containing Slovenian material were made mainly due to a desire for sales and profit. The fate of the discs was predominantly decided by the market. Those performers who were well received by the buyers made records more frequently as well as for various gramophone companies, and successful discs were reissued several times, thus reaching a wider audience.

Discs from recording sessions in Ljubljana before the First World War are few and far between. Despite that, the Digital Collection of Gramophone Records (GNI DZGP) located at the Institute of Ethnomusicology at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, contains quite a few records and graphic material from these records, mainly those by Slovenska kmečka godba, literally translated as Slovenian Farmers' Band, and various singing groups made up of members of Glasbena matica. There are even several copies and various reissues of some records. The experience of researchers of historical sound recordings and collectors of gramophone records makes it possible to surmise that those records that were more popular and therefore sold better are also easier to find today (cf. Gronow 2014). It could therefore be concluded that some discs recorded in Ljubljana were also favourably received by the buyers and sold well. Some records by these performers were reissued in the following years by various record labels, including those located in the US, which can also serve as a confirmation of popularity of these records with the buyers, and of their market success. Uncharacteristically, however, apart from the adverts, these records had no major impact on the media and the performers. The preserved reports, chronicles, archival materials and various newspaper sources contain almost no information on the recording sessions and records, even though this was probably the first such event in what would later become Slovenia. This holds true for all performers who made recordings in that period and for records of various genres.

When it comes to Slovenian records in the USA, the situation is quite different, as most have been preserved. An important reason for this might be that the majority of these records were made between the two world wars, when the gramophone industry was in its heyday and when records sold very well in general. However, what should not be overlooked is the significant interest of the buyers, Slovenian emigrants, in such records, and their special attitude towards them.

An overview of the recorded Slovenian music shows that gramophone records mainly included music and songs which were frequently performed at various cultural events in that period and which were also a staple of the songbooks and repertoires of folk musicians. The arrangements were fairly simple and were meant for smaller groups, making the organisation and technological aspects of recording easier. It also made more sense commercially to offer well-known and well-established music, i.e. well-liked and with recognisable musical content.

Traditional music can frequently be found on the early Slovenian gramophone recordings. This music has important cultural, ethnomusicological, folkloristic, and ethnochoreological value and significance. Most of them represent very early sound recordings of Slovenian traditional music (cf. Kunej D. 2008).

Gramophone records containing traditional instrumental music are especially interesting. On the topic of the Slovenian material, Rebeka Kunej (2013, 2014) points out, based on a study of the gramophone records made by the Hoyer Trio, that records with traditional dance melodies were appealing enough for a certain audience to attract buyers. This leads to the conclusion that some traditional Slovenian dance melodies were so popular at the time that the performers wanted to present them and the public wanted to buy them, thus allowing the gramophone companies to benefit from them financially. Because of the commercial nature of the recorded material, the decisive criterion for the choice of music was its popularity (with the audience as well as with the performers). On the other hand, the material later recorded by folk music researchers in the field, and for documentation purposes, was made in accordance with the researchers' interests. As a result, only the content that the researchers assumed to be academically relevant was typically recorded. One could almost say in some cases that the audio material on the old gramophone records could actually be a more telling source for the actual musical practices than the audio materials recorded by researchers in the decades since the 1950s. At the very least, it can be considered to be an excellent comparative resource. As such, gramophone records can help to shed new light on traditional dance music. Listening to these

recordings gives us insight into the sound of the traditional instrumental dance music from the period when the recordings were made and from which period Slovenians have no other recordings.³

The case study of the Hoyer Trio gramophone records further reveals the beginnings of the popularisation and commercialisation of Slovenian traditional music and its interweaving with other genres. Many Hoyer Trio records contain music born out of the folk heritage and enriched with the popular US genres of the day. Slovenian performers greatly contributed to the creation and popularisation of the new polka musical genre, and the Hoyer Trio are seen by many as the pioneers of Slovenian polka music in the USA. Cleveland, with its large population of Slovenian immigrants, became the centre of polka music and developed its own Cleveland Style, also called the Slovenian Style. Slovenian polka music reached its peak of popularity with Frankie Yankovic, whose Americanisation of Slovenian music created tunes that were not only popular with other ethnic groups, but also pop music lovers in general. He recorded a couple of million-seller records, was given the nickname “America’s Polka King,” and received a Grammy in 1986, the first ever to be awarded for this music genre.

Matt Hoyer and his Hoyer Trio were among the originators of the new style and were very successful performers. The accordion was joined by the banjo and the guitar; the traditional Slovenian folk music was thus imbued with jazz and other popular music genres, evidently resulting in a winning combination. The band’s performances and records were not only immensely popular, but also influenced the future generations of Slovenian polka musicians in the USA. For his immense contribution to the development of Slovenian polka music, Matt Hoyer received a lifetime achievement award from the National Cleveland-Style Polka Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland. Matt is considered by many to be the originator of Slovenian polka music in the USA and is often called the pioneer or granddaddy of Cleveland-Style Polka Music (cf. National Cleveland-Style).

3 It was understood until recently that the oldest recorded examples of Slovenian traditional dance music were directly connected to the field research of the Institute of Ethnomusicology and its tape recordings; the Institute acquired its first tape recorder in 1954 and started making systematic field recordings in January 1955, when the oldest field recordings of Slovenian instrumental folk music were made (cf. Kunej D. 1999). But after the old gramophone records were listened to, many of the recordings could be defined as traditional music. The ethnochoreological case study of Matt Hoyer’s and the Hoyer Trio’s records – based on collected historical and ethnological data about the Trio, on analysed sound material from preserved and digitised original records, and on different sources and metadata accompanying the records – shows that most of the folk-dance music repertoire had already been recorded on gramophone records (Kunej R. 2013).

The recordings on early gramophone records nowadays represent a priceless repository of recorded sound and can, due to their historical value, be justifiably considered to be a highly important musical heritage, as well as an important source for the understanding of music production and its transformation in the beginning of the 20th century. The recordings encompass various musical and artistic genres and reflect the aesthetics and sounds of the past. Since music is an experiential phenomenon, difficult to describe and verbalise, this is especially valuable. Recorded material makes it possible to take a look at certain musical and aesthetic tastes of a given period. Because of the wealth of content and sound conveyed by such a collection, it can be of interest to all academic disciplines dealing with the research of music and artistic performance from the historical perspective.

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