

# **GHT Rundschrift**

Nr. 29, December 2017

## **18<sup>th</sup> Diskografentag 12 - 14 May in Hanover (Germany)**



The participants of the Diskografentag in the Villa Seligmann in Hanover (Photo: Winfried Nau)

## 18<sup>th</sup> GHT Diskografentag in Hanover

The 18<sup>th</sup> Diskografentag of the GHT was held in Hanover (Germany) from 12 to 14 May 2017 and was hosted by the Museum für Energiegeschichte(n). This museum has collections about the industrial history of Hanover including the archive of the record company Deutsche Grammophon. The conference started with a welcome speech of the Director of the museum Tim S. Müller. In the following, he guided us through the current exhibition of the museum about the German inventor and father of the electric power industry Werner von Siemens.



During the tour through the exhibition (Photo: Enrico Pigorsch)

After that, the conference program started which included on three days over 20 presentations. Only some of them can be mentioned here. **Stephan Puille (Germany)** told us the very interesting and fascinating story of his search for the very first commercial records. **Michael Pienkowski (Poland)** presented first research results about Lindström record labels in Poland. The first years of the German record company Electrola were explored by **Oliver Wurl (Germany)**. Within the presentations of the technical experts group **Morton Hein (Denmark)** discussed copy concepts and the related principles, methods and ethics issues. The German expert **Christian Zwarg** presented his work on a new method for determining record speeds and pitches.



Stephan Puille at his presentation about the very first commercial records (Photo: Enrico Pigorsch)

The last day of the conference was held in the Villa Seligmann. Siegmund Seligmann (1853-1925) was the Director of the tyre company Continental. His villa in Hanover is today home of the Siegmund Seligmann Foundation which is dedicated to the documentation, research and practicing of Jewish music.

The GHT members were warmly welcomed by the Director of the Villa Seligmann Prof. Andor Izsák who guided us through the house and explained und demonstrated interesting aspects of Jewish music. The following presentations of the conference dealt also with subjects about Jewish music or Jewish artists. **Fernec János Szabó (Hungary)** presented recordings of the opera singer Elza Szamosi (Samek) (1881-1924). **Axel Weggen (Germany)** talked about "Kantoren-Gesang auf Schellackplatten aus Synagogen in Deutschland" (Cantors' singing from synagogues in Germany on shellac disc). At last, **Pekka Gronow (Finland)** told us about the Harry Orvomaa collection of Jewish records.



Prof. Andor Izsák, Director of the Villa Seligmann, and Christiane Hofer, President of the GHT  
(Photo: Enrico Pigorsch)

On the first day of the Diskografentag the General assembly of the GHT was held. Beside the reports of the GHT board about the GHT activities in the last year, two important aspects appeared which will influence the work of the GHT in the future. Firstly, the GHT had again to face a financial deficit like in the preceding years. Secondly and more important, the President Christiane Hofer and the Treasurer Erich Heiss will retire and the GHT have to find and to elect new board members at the General Assembly in 2018. Further information and first comments on this situation is given below.

At the conference, Claus Peter Gallenmiller presented the GHT Base WEB - the new digital discography platform of the GHT. This data base will be accessible to all GHT members. To get your access code please contact Claus Peter. Further information on the GHT Base WEB can be found in the supplement to this GHT-Rundschrift.

## **Proposals and resolutions of the General Assembly from 12 May 2017 for a secure financial management of GHT in the near future**

by Erich Heiss

The report of the GHT-bursar Erich Heiss showed for the year 2016 a deficit of financial means of approx. 5,700 € (despite of donations of approx. 7,300 €). As promised donations of 6,000 € for balancing the deficit existed, the elected auditing members of GHT agreed to the financial statements for 2016.

A proposal to raise the annual membership fee from 25 Euro to 50 Euro (for institutional members and promoting members from 50 Euro to 100 Euro, respectively), from 2018 onwards, was accepted unanimously.

A further proposal to improve the financials of GHT was also brought to the General Assembly's notice. It is therefore communicated to all members of GHT:

„When GHT-members make the payment for the membership in 2017 a voluntary payment which could be the difference between the official member's fee for 2017 and the new higher fee for 2018 would be very appreciated.“

# **Gesellschaft für historische Tonträger**

## **Some strategic considerations**

by Morton Hein

Two important issues were tabled at this year's general assembly in GHT. First the accounting showed a deficit that had been covered by Christiane Hofer personally. There was a general appreciation for this. At the same time it was clear that measures should be taken to avoid this to happen again. A 100% raise in membership fee for 2018 was agreed unanimously. A later suggestion of a voluntary extra payment € 25 for this year has hopefully been well received and carried out by the members.

The second issue was more severe. It was announced that Die Präsidentin Frau Hofer and the treasurer Erik Heiss will retire at the next general assembly in 2018. This leaves GHT in a very uncomfortable and insecure situation. I will try to elaborate on the consequences and measures to pass GHT into the future.

### **What is GHT?**

GHT is in my observation a composite body made of several entities. The two main entities are:

Entity one: GHT is an operation in Vienna (Archive etc)

Entity two: GHT is a professional association

GHT has some assets to observe:

A database

A publishing function

I am not sure if these assets serve both entities equally.

A continuation into the future in this concept would mean that a large part of the management should be based in Vienna. I have seen no indications of that as an option. If so what to do next?

I will come with my deliberations from the starting point that the most important part to bring forward is the professional association.

Before going further I should like to give my observation that GHT is a German language entity and would be located best in Germany. Most of the members come from Germany and most of the affiliations are with institutions in Germany. (Said ironically in my Danish/English form)

### **Some options**

Model A and surely an almost impossible model: To keep the two entities together with Vienna as the hub for activities.

Model B would be to have the two entities together and moving the hub into Germany

Model C would be to separate the entities and find the conditions for a happy divorce.

Here I am on thin ice. I know that there is relation to Die Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Dresden (SLUB). But I am not sure if this is a planned discontinuing of the Entity One in Vienna – or just cooperation.

There are several options:

Entity One could just be closed down in Vienna without further operation in the field.

Entity One could be transferred to SLUB and a formal cooperation with SLUB and GHT could be established.

Entity One could be transferred to someone else: Any suggestions?

GHT (Entity Two) will still have the need to keep and enlarge the database. Can this be done with SLUB or did I hear Claus Peter Gallenmiller talking of a combined member effort to do so? The level of publication should not be lesser than today so here are several practical and logistic issues.

This will demand further investigation and more considerations. A new world order should not be established before the next GHT meeting in Helsinki but the general transition should be a clear plan that can be agreed in Helsinki.

### **And what about the future of GHT?**

We have to face that fact that the average age of the members goes up every year. Not with one year – as newcomers even younger newcomers appear. But the average age is going up. Luckily the members are in good shape and can last quite a few years more. But we need a strategy.

One thing has made me wonder. Often there are presentations of projects where quite young people are telling about what they are doing. Often it is very interesting but most of them don't join as members afterwards. Is that the fault of GHT? One could say yes. But even in my high age I know the conditions of young academics. They are fighting desperately for their project for the financing and for getting academic credit. It is – no doubt – giving academic credit to the CV to have given a presentation under the heading of GHT and that is very important. Young academics fight a terrible battle for recognition and the hope for having a permanent position. We have so many examples alone in my family so I know the problems.

GHT must do better to not only inviting all the good youngsters but also to drag them into the family of GHT. They go to GHT to improve their CVs but we can give them more.

How do they observe us? A bunch of old people talking about things they don't care for? A group of nerds you cannot learn from?

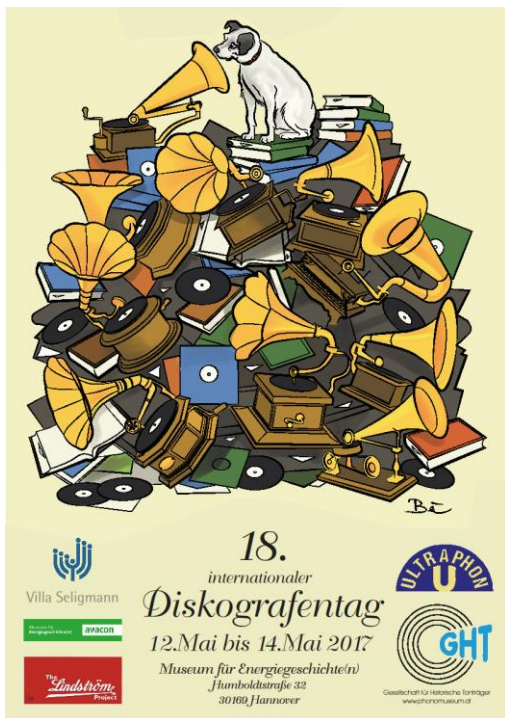
I think we could do two things:

First we could ask Susana Belchior, who is the youngest Beirat in GHT, to assess the situation for young academics in combination with efforts to recruit them for GHT. She has personally been successful so she must know the tricks.

Secondly we could make a map of members' knowledge and expertise. In that way would not have only to look at the nerds and the old men but could also have the chance to look at a list of knowledge and expertise.

I promised two years ago to do a structure of expertise expressed from the agendas of GHT meetings. I have made a starting structure but not done the job due to all too many other circumstances. As an excuse I would offer to do a structure for knowledge in the framework of GHT. If a structure could be found this could be forwarded to the members so they could map the personal expertise. This would enlighten newcomers so they get an insight view in the topic of historical sound and so they don't believe they are looking at a bunch of person like stamp collectors looking for deviations in perforations of just another stamp. (There is nothing wrong in collection stamps. It is the way you do it. The same can be said about gramophone records.)

I have made this so quick as I could because I believe it is important. Yesterday I was busy attending the Inge Lehmann day at the Copenhagen University. She was the person that found the inner hard core of the world. I am restoring the only sound recording with her. The picture shows the minister of higher education revealing her monument with the inner core.



Vereinsregisterauszug zum Stichtag 15.09.2009	
<b>Allgemeine Daten</b>	
Zuständige(n)	Bundespolickektion Wien, Büro für Vereins-, Versammlungs- und Medienrechtsangelegenheiten
ZVR-Zahl	18090560
<b>Vereinsdaten</b>	
Name	Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger
Stz.	Wien
Stz	Keine Eintragung genehmigt
Zustellanschrift	1090 Wien, Rossauelände 22A/2
Land	Österreich
Erstbelegungsdatum	16.11.2002
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Tagestatum - Uhrzeit	Dienstag 15. September 2009 19:27:16
Seite 1 von 1	

## 15 JAHRE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR HISTORISCHE TONTRÄGER

Christiane Hofer

Beginnen hat alles mit dem EU-Sokrates-Grundtvig Projekt

„Künstler- und Firmendiskografien der Schellackzeit unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Unterhaltungsmusik“, das zwischen 2001 -2006 unter der Leitung von Christiane Hofer durchgeführt wurde. Die Partner waren:

Universität Udine sede in Gorizia ( Studio Mirage)

Österreichisches Volksliedwerk, Wien

(Österr. Mediathek) ab 2002 Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger, Wien

Allgäu-Schwäbisches Musikarchiv, Eglöfs

Beratungsstelle für Volksmusik in Franken, Uffenheim

Assoziierter Partner: Schweizer Phonotheek, Lugano



**„Schellacks sind nicht nur zum Hören da. Leitfaden für Interessierte“** von Franz Lechleitner  
Redaktionelle Mitarbeit: Michaela Brodl, Christiane Hofer, Gerda Lechleitner, Michael Meier und Ernst Weber, Wien 2006, war die erste Veröffentlichung der Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger.

Am 16. November 2002 wurde die Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger in Wien als Verein gegründet. ( siehe Vereinsregisterauszug der Polizeidirektion Wien)

Vorstand/Board:

- 2002-2004 Franz Lechleitner- Ernst Weber-Christian Hofer-Gerda Lechleitner- Michael Arié-Gerhard Kuba
- 2004-2006 Ernst Weber – Christiane Hofer- Erich Heiss
- 2006- 2017 Christiane Hofer – Claus Peter Gallenmiller – Erich Heiss
- Ehrenpräsident Günther Schifter+  
Ehrenmitglied Ella Lengyel

Wissenschaftlicher Beirat:

- Alessandro Argentini  
Susana Belchior  
Claus Peter Gallenmiller  
Pekka Gronow  
Morten Hein  
Rainer E. Lotz

Rechnungsprüfer:

- Ella Lengyel  
Willi Schlager  
Helmuth Schröder

Ganz besonders möchte ich an die beiden Gründungsmitglieder Günther Schifter (1923 – 2008) und Norbert Nitsche (1925 – 2011) erinnern.

Günther Schifter hat mit seinen Radio-und TV-Sendungen, aber auch durch viele Vorträge einen unvergessenen Beitrag zur Wertschätzung der alten Tonaufnahmen nicht nur in Österreich geleistet.

Norbert Nitsche war der bedeutendste Diskograf seiner Zeit in Österreich. Die GHT verdankt ihm einen immensen Datenschatz.



Norbert Nitsche (links) Günther Schifter



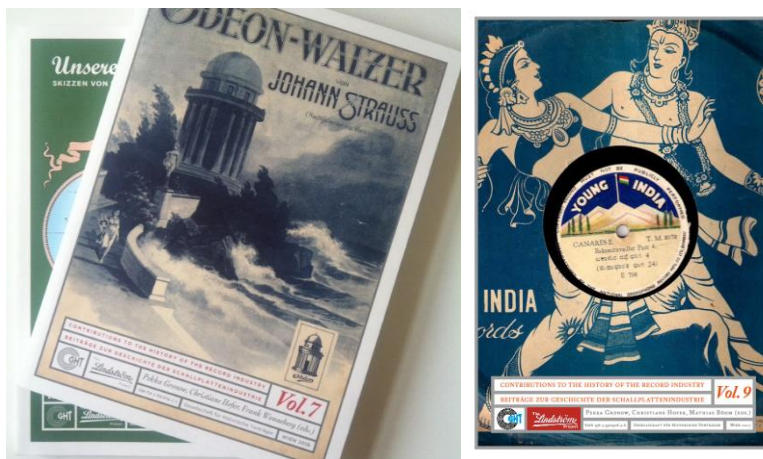
Unvergessen sind auch die Mitarbeiter beim „Lindström Project“ Frank Andrews (1920-2014) und Frank Phillips (1938-2015).

Peter Burkowitz (1920-2012) haben wir unvergessliche Vorträge bei den Diskografentagen und bleibende Veröffentlichungen in den „Beiträgen zur Geschichte der Schallplatten-Industrie“ zu verdanken.

Es ist mir nicht möglich, alle unsere Förderer und Freundinnen und Freunde hier namentlich zu nennen. Aber sie bleiben in der Gemeinschaft der Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger unvergessen.

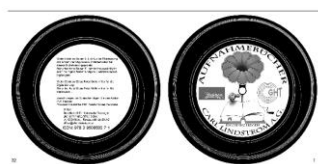
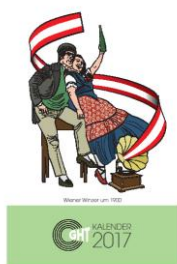
Als Plattform des Erkenntnisaustausches und Forum des Wissens hat sich von Anfang an die internationale Konferenz, „Diskografentag“, die jeweils in einem anderen Land veranstaltet wird, etabliert.

Daneben werden mit dem Jahrbuch „ Beiträge zur Geschichte der Schallplattenindustrie/ Contributions to the history of the record industry“ und fallweisen Sonderheften (Editors: Pekka Gronow-Christiane Hofer - Frank Wonneberg-Mathias Böhm) die Grundlagen zu intensiver weiterführender Beschäftigung mit alten Tonträgern gelegt.



Die „Rundschrift“ (Editor: Enrico Pigorsch) verbindet die Mitglieder der Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger in regelmäßigen Abständen und ist der Nährboden für das Vereinsleben. Immer wieder werden auch interessante Anregungen zu den verschiedensten einschlägigen Themen veröffentlicht.

Der Kalender, die diversen CD-Produktionen und Exkursionen sind weitere Aktivitäten der GHT, die es immer wieder von Neuem wertvoll macht, Mitglied zu sein.



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GESELLSCHAFT FÜR HISTORISCHE TONTRÄGER und Sammlung Alfred Seiser  
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## BEITRITTSERKLÄRUNG / Registration Form

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## The sound of early phonographs in the context of technological progress: machine or instrument?

by Philipp Schubert

While listening to an early recording on vinyl or cylinder – preferably played on a high-grade gramophone – one immediately recognizes the crackling and hissing, which inevitably is part of it. The aural experience is thereby not only characterized by the information contained in the recording itself, but also by those numerous background noises, which are produced and amplified by needle, pickup, horn and resonator. An untrained HiFi-Enthusiast with sophisticated ears would probably not describe the sound of those early records as being particularly delightful. And also an amateur would notice the imperfection of the aged sound technology. In addition to the background noises, the frequency range was much more limited than what we are accustomed to from magnetic tape, long player and CD. For example, the sound could be described as tinny or reedy.

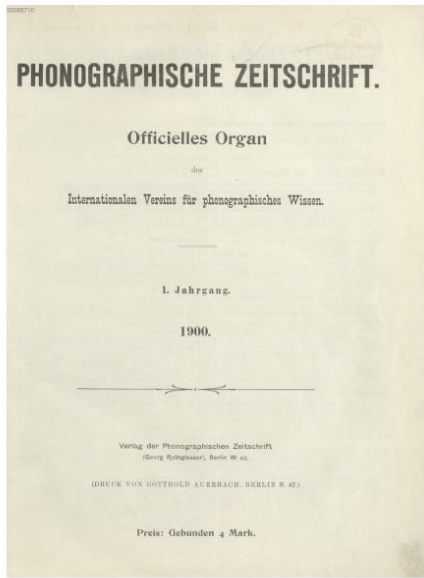
From this point of view of technical perception – because the music contained on those records remains left out for now – I asked myself what kind of impression the sound of those early recordings gave to contemporaries. Was the tonal quality of Thomas Edison's first phonograph in 1877 perceived as being disturbing? Or was the admiration for the technical possibility to record sound greater than the desire for a perfect result? Which aesthetical categories of describing sound were developing? How have recorded sounds been valued in contrast to the original, the live performance? And finally: have phonograph and gramophone been recognized as objects of modernity for their noisiness alone? Could it be placed in a broader context with the electrical revolution or the social-technological advancement at the turn of the century, respectively?

The results of that analysis accumulated to my Master thesis “Only scratching noises? The phonograph and its aesthetical reflexion in German literature and society from 1877 until Weimar Republic”<sup>1</sup>, from which a selection of studies shall be presented here.

The questioning is initially based on our present point of view and listening habits. The DIN standard “high fidelity”<sup>2</sup>, that makes great quality of sound possible since the 1960s, describes the bio-physically perceptible frequencies the human auditory system can detect, in the process of recording and playing sound carriers. Our auditory sense is used to that standard and recognizes sound recordings, that are significantly within the threshold of 16 Hz, respectively 15-20 Khz, as poor quality. That is basically the case in all of the sound recordings from the “horn era”, the mechanical recordings. In addition to those limitations regarding to the authenticity of the sound image, other disturbing noises came along, that resulted from immaturely constructed phonographs: the self-resonance of those devices led to clinking and rattling parts. Inadequately developed spring drives or even manual operation led to a grinding sound and ruined the musical enjoyment. Different horn designs emphasized certain formants and swallowed up others. The material quality of pickups and needles, the granularity of the material used for the record discs, the not negligible abrasion of the records by incorrect handling, like no swapping of the needle – all that changed the pure sound information, that was carved to the audio track of a record or cylinder, to the worse. Under this aspect, it seems surprising that the recording industry grew up to a lucrative business and one of the largest export markets of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

To classify the sound of early phonographs, the opinions of those are needed, that reported about their impressions. Since there are hardly any contemporary witnesses alive today, the written form of subjective evaluation of sound quality remains the primary source of information for approaching a cultural history of hearing from 1877 onwards.

Early newspaper reports about phonographic events of all sorts could be found in the daily press like *Hamburger Nachrichten* or illustrated papers. One inexhaustible main source was obviously the *Phonographische Zeitschrift*, the earliest institution of the phonographic lobby. Here, the first ten volumes from 1900 until 1910 have been analyzed.<sup>4</sup>



Phonographische Zeitschrift 1900/Vol. 1



title page Phonographische Zeitschrift 1906/Vol. 7

Figure 1

This has previously been done by Stephan Gauß for his monograph “Nadel, Rille, Trichter”, published in 2009. Again, the wealth of material could be gainfully explored regarding to the aforementioned thematic focuses. During that work, the opinions of people facing the technological progress were discovered. The judgements and reports of the publishing technicians, scientists, traders and collectors are subject to a technological optimism, the idea that mechanical inventions make life easier and are there to solve everyday problems. In the minds of those technophile people, phonograph and gramophone do not only serve as music reproducing devices. Following the ten-point plan, that Thomas Edison once added to his invention as a manual and in which he described the cylinder and its function as the primary storage for speech, the ideas for the usage of those devices almost became absurd after 1900. Some examples: the phonograph was supposed to replace the preacher in church, the political agitator, the witness before court and even the parrot's teacher – just to name a few.



Figures 2 and 3

Quelle: Kladderadatsch, 60. Jg., Heft 49, Siebentes Beiblatt, 08. Dezember 1907.  
<http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:flg01-101007-00097>  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7797/101007-00097>

This discourse of technical and social aspects now needed to be widened in order to incorporate a broader range of opinions. Like mentioned before, the daily press with its critical, sometimes opposing positions, has been a key factor to direct attention from the enthusiastic cheers of the phono-fans to other problems of those devices. An additional source was assumed to be contemporary fiction. Authors and writers also responded to the current events of the time, new trends and a modern atmosphere, like artists, philosophers and musicians did as well.

For this, meta-search engines with full-text search were used: explicitly the collection of public-domain texts *wikisource*<sup>5</sup> and the *gutenbergDE-project*<sup>6</sup>, which contains over 8.000 titles of texts in German language, provided meaningful outputs for the keywords “Phonograph”, “Schallplatte”, “Grammophon” or “Sprechmaschine”. However, considering the overwhelming amount of results, no detailed categorization of the text fragments could be applied. Selection was done by the appearance of mentioned keywords and the description of the phonographic device, its sound generation and its sound environment as well as its position in the literary scene.

Thereby, the following observations were made: the presence of the gramophone ranges from entire chapters, like, for example, the probably most popular gramophone-scene in Thomas Mann's *Zauberberg* or poems, like Christian Morgenstern's ode *Das Grammophon*. Often, it was just decorating inventory.



Thomas Mann listening to his gramophone

Figure 4

Definitely evident was the increasing appearance of the topic phonography from 1910 and the culmination of related subjects in the 1920s. Interestingly, an opinion contrary to the one of the phonographic lobbyists stands out.

While those were praising progress through technology, the phonograph was seen mainly critical in fiction literature. On the one hand because of its tone. It was not described as well-sounding, but rather “ugly, metallic snoring”, “croaky, tinny gargling and grunting”<sup>7</sup>, “grinding” or “pitiful singing”, “nasally squawking and roaring”<sup>8</sup>. In descriptions, that go beyond the pure experience of sound, the phonograph and gramophone are symbols for a bleak and dangerous world. Franz Kafka shall serve as an example here. In his novel *Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers*, the narrating I finds himself in a typical, kafkaesque situation, marked by internal and external constraints. Though, the narrator is expected to attend a festive dinner, he lets a shady stranger guide him through the alleys of the city. As this person is getting exposed as a trickster (“Bauernfänger”), a recruiter for brothels, the narrator is still not able to turn his back to the stranger. This situation is being accompanied by a metaphorical reticence of the surroundings, that reflects the protagonist's perception. Among other things, he notices a “gramophone, that sang against the closed windows of some room”<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, the gramophone can be interpreted as the psychological expression of the main character. In that scene, the device, that is just producing sound instead of sounding, mirrors the state of mind of the protagonist and defines his anxiety and affliction.

Also in Kafka's *Prozess*. K, the doomed protagonist of the novel, recognizes a “in better quarters disused” instrument, which starts to play “murderously”<sup>10</sup>. Here, the phonograph is made a symbol of the class society on one hand, and of K's nightmare on the other.

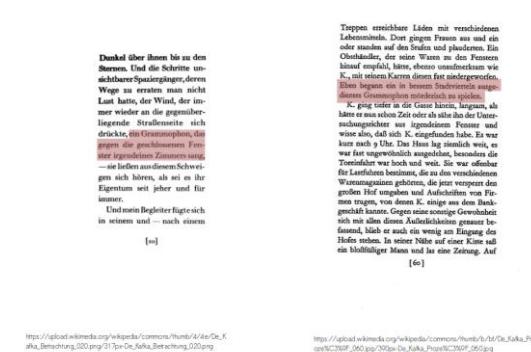


Figure 5

The same applies to the folk play *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald* from Ödön von Horváth. A constantly accompanying, portable gramophone plays cheerful melodies like *Strauß' waltz*, the wedding march or arias from Puccini's *La Bohème*. This is used to illustrate fake love scenes around the couple Marianne and Oskar, which take place in Vienna of the 1920s. On the surface, everything looks like a happy soap opera. But actually, the image of a morally corrupt society is drawn. The bright gramophone melodies form the soundtrack of a tragedy and become a sinister omen on their own. On further look on literature it is getting obvious, that phonographic devices have a rather negative connotation. Whether as a religious object, in form of a sonorous shrine, personified as human that talks a lot but does not say much, as a misleading subject of a future vision, or as technical subtlety in the “here and now” – the benefit of phonographs has not been considered solely positive and often been questioned. The main focus was not the reproduction of musical outputs, but the emission of potentially unwanted and displeasing human, animal or mechanical noises are paramount. If one understands the authors as critical observers and reporters of the spirit of their age, the question arises, if they were closer to the overall feelings of the contemporary listeners, as the expert audience, that exchanged views in *Phonographischen Zeitschrift*?

To take up on that question, a more detailed view on the motivation of the specialist audience could help: Which aesthetic categories regarding the beauty of sound were used among the phonographic lobby, while that was rarely discussed in fictional texts?

Definitely, the quality of sound – or its improvement – was one of the main topics among experts. Keywords like *authenticity*, *naturalness* and *purity* were subject of heated debates. The so-called “phonograph tone”<sup>11</sup> described the characteristics of the phonographic sound. This was defined in a variety of ways. Firstly, it was determined by the handling of audio carriers and playing devices.

For example, one reader criticized the overspeed playback of cylinders: in the early times of sound recording, the monitoring of those cylinders was the only possibility to recognize failures in the recording process. However, this step was not implemented in the production procedure, but was left to the employees of the retail stores. In order to do that in a efficient manner, the workers raised the playback speed – resulting in developing an altered taste for musical performances. This would transfer to the customer, who gets exposed to the wrongly timed recordings. Because only slightly altered playback speeds could distort the sound experience. The same applied to the average consumer, who purchased a low-end device. Often, those devices had stepless adjustable speed controllers. Thus, the playback speed was subject to the individual taste of the user, which – in some extreme cases – could have turned certain opera performances into Mickey-Mouse-chants. According to author Julius Bergfeld's opinion, another fact was responsible for the negative attitude

towards phonographic devices: jukeboxes, which significantly increased the popularity of phonographs in the 1890s and changed listening habits towards individual enjoyment, suffered from a loss of quality through frequent use and a lack of maintenance. While “performances were almost perfect at first, one might even think to be just in front of singers and musicians”, the same cylinder sounded completely different one year later: “a gruesome, deafening and ear-hurting music came out of the horn”.<sup>12</sup>

On the other side, the phonographic tone was determined by background noises like “croakiness, screeching, scratching and hissing” – to name a few of the attributes mentioned by the author. Austrian critic, playwright and librettist Rudolf Lothar explicitly responded to that. In his 1924 *Technical-aesthetic experiment* - one of the few monographs on that topic – he concentrated solely on the “speaking machine”.<sup>13</sup> He systemized two kinds of noises: obligate ones and unnecessary ones. Obligate he called those, that are given by nature and therefore are the “born enemies”: for example a “faint buzz noise and hissing”, resulting from the graininess of the disc materials. While it is not interfering during loud orchestral passages, it is easily audible and recognizable in quieter passages. The “artistically feeling listener” should be able to ignore those thanks to his “power of illusion”. All other noises like “clinking, rattling, puffing, thumping, knocking and squeaking” should be considered redundant, as they are avoidable by technical progression.

The background noises: did the consumers have to accept those as “unavoidable flaws”? In *Phonographische Zeitschrift* different explanations could be found. There, the habituation effect or dullness of the auditory sense is mentioned. Comparable to the effect of getting used to the noises of big cities.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, a comparison between phonographs and orchestral instruments is made, whose sound generations – on a physical basis – do not happen with a certain amount of noise.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the noises of phonographs were considered to be a property that characterizes those devices, making the difference between machine and instrument. The awareness of the uniqueness of the device can be found in specialized media from 1905 onwards. Not the noiseless reproduction, but a preferably beautiful tone, resulting from the self-resonance of high-grade devices was getting increasingly considered to be the standard of a aesthetically great musical enjoyment. The possibilities of altering the sound by changing horn designs, pickups and needles was rated as an additional way to form an individual taste.<sup>16</sup> Those options were mainly left to the just emerging species of “audiophiles”, though. Even if the background noise was being perceived as an aesthetical attribute in that discussion, there are some other, much more important factors. Interestingly, the playback quality of audio carriers gets judged in terms of an ideally close approximation to the live experience. Already at the first demonstrations of the Edison phonograph, instrumental or singing performances recorded on cylinders were compared to the corresponding live events.<sup>17</sup> At that time, physical measurands in acoustics were not easily quantifiable and were subject to the individual perception of the listener. This might be the reason why sound quality was often judged by loudness and reverb.<sup>18</sup> The louder the performance of a phonograph was, the more its sound quality was valued. Mainly in the years between 1900 and 1910, an aspiration for loudness developed, that culminated in the development and use of so-called “Starktonmaschinen” (high volume machines).



Concert with high-volume gramophone  
in Swinemünde, 1908  
<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0008/bsb00088725/magnus/index.html>  
file=103174298.202&seite=115&galle=

Figure 6

Those were gramophones, where the stimulated impulse of the needle was amplified by compressed air streams or friction. The sound of those devices was getting compared in competitions, as in 1909. Specialist press representatives and audience were impressed by the “sheer loudness” and the “natural trueness of the sound image” and reacted – as stated in reports – with “spontaneous applause” and “increased liveliness”.<sup>19</sup>

In harsh contrast to those reports stands the concert review of *Berliner Tageblatt*: the event is being entitled the “contest of roaring machines”, the sound experience described as “deafening sonority” and “screaming with compressed air”. The critic blames the phono-fans as philistines, which prompted strong backlashes.<sup>20</sup>

Review about the competition of high-volume machines, *Berliner Tageszeitung*, 26th of february, 1909

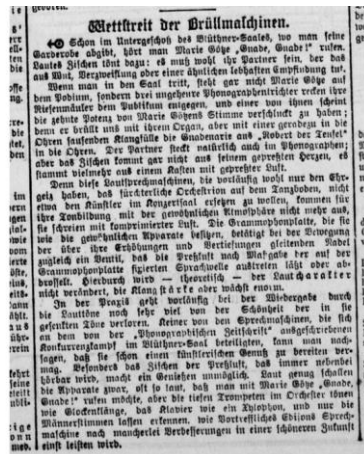


Figure 7

Back to the question from the very beginning: Can phonographic devices be classified as objects of modern age because of their sonic attributes?

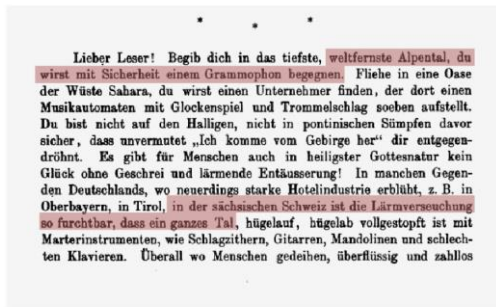
Based on the previously mentioned examples the impression arises, those devices were not sophisticated enough to provide a high quality musical experience. Was the appeal lying solely in the technical aspects? Furthermore, the era of mechanical recording got stuck in a just slightly enhanced quality standard for several decades, as Peter Burkowitz once observed.<sup>21</sup> Only the electrical recordings ensured – from the mid 1920s – a new, innovative and different listening experience.

On the other hand, contemporary fiction gives the impression that the speaking machine is a technical device with a negative aura, that originates from its sonic, visual and haptic features. Has it been the new, changing urban and rural soundscape, indebted to the modern technical age, within which the phonograph holds its ground as a technical-aesthetical device? The adaptation to noise as a sign of social progression?

In order to find answers to those questions, it was searched for supporters and opponents of technological advancement. And if phonographs were subject to their respective programs. The search, however, ended with a sobering conclusion. The famous critics of technology of the turn of the century Oswald Spengler, Ludwig Klages or Werner Sombart did not mention the practice of record-listening. Also, in publications of reformist movements like Wandervogel or the garden city movement, which are characterized by a pristine lifestyle and preached an existence far away from rush and haste, phonography was not a subject. Sign of deliberate refusal or of a phenomenon that was commonplace already.

An answer to this provides philosopher Theodor Lessing, who became popular by founding the anti-noise-association. His opinion, stated in his 1908 pamphlet *Der Lärm*<sup>22</sup> was, that the world was already suffering from the “music pest”. No matter where to travel, phonographic devices would have taken over every single quiet place on earth, even the “deepest, remote valley in the alps” or “the oases in sahara”.





[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/01/De\\_L3C30Adm.pdf](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/01/De_L3C30Adm.pdf)

Figure 8

His aversion, however, was leaning against every kind of urban, technical and even human noise and must be understood as an extreme example. At least, him and his fellow campaigners represented, what would be called noise control today and they pointed out the illness promoting effect of loudness and fuss.

The art movement of the futurists shall serve as another extreme example. Their absolute technical fanaticism, their love for machines, speed and noise manifested in bizarre music, lyric and paintings. Especially Luigi Russolo, with his *L'arte dei rumori*, created a new kind of mechanical music, composed out of noises of the new technical world.<sup>23</sup>



Luigi Russolo and his „Infronarumori“ (music instruments producing noise)

<https://motocountdown.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/luigi-russolo.jpg>

Figure 9

He was probably not aware of the fact that gramophones - because of their ability to record exactly those noises – would have been ideal for his purpose. Also in the numerous text published by the futurists, the phonograph was not mentioned. Maybe their usage seemed to bourgeois and their appearance to gentle. Only in the mid 1920s artists came up with the idea to use the recordable disc as a carrier medium for self-produced sounds.<sup>24</sup>

Eventually, there is to note that the contemporary terminology “speaking machine” emphasizes the mechanical characteristics of the phonograph not without justification: the technical features found their expression in the sound. This was obviously embellished more by technology admiring people rather than by those, who adopted a critical position towards technology. Aesthetically, the attitude manifested itself, that background noises are natural characteristics of those devices. Thus, the machines were treated like musical instruments. On the other hand, phonographic devices – because of their loudness and sonority – were put on the same level with traffic noise and the sound emission of production plants and therefore became part of an urbanized world defined by technology.

Whether it was perceived as a noisy machine was subject to the listener's perspective. Mainly people who were negatively disposed to progress in general would classify it as noise.

Translation: Peter Erler

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<sup>1</sup> „Nur Kratzen und Rauschen? Der Phonoapparat und seine ästhetische Reflexion in deutscher Literatur und Gesellschaft von 1877 bis in die Weimarer Republik“, Technische Universität Dresden, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Schlemm, „Musikproduktion“, in: *MGG<sup>2</sup>*, hrsg. von Ludwig Finscher, Bd. 6, Kassel u.a. <sup>2</sup>1997 (= Sachteil), S. 1534–1551, hier Sp. 1549.

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Gauß, *Nadel, Rille, Trichter: Kulturgeschichte des Phonographen und des Grammophons in Deutschland (1900 - 1940)*, Köln u.a. 2009, S. 54, 56.

<sup>4</sup> „Phonographische Zeitschrift (1900-1938) Digitale Sammlungen“, online: <http://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/index.html?c=sammlung&projekt=1386147579&l=de>

<sup>5</sup> „Wikisource“, online: <https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Hauptseite>

<sup>6</sup> „Projekt Gutenberg - Klassische Literatur Online“, online: <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/>

<sup>7</sup> Lothar Schmidt, „Eine Stimme aus dem Jenseits“, in: *Das Buch der seltsamen Geschichten*, hrsg. von Norbert Falk, Berlin 1914.

<sup>8</sup> Kurt Tucholsky, *Mit 5 PS*, Berlin 1929.

<sup>9</sup> Franz Kafka, „Die Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers“, in: *Betrachtung*, o. Hrsg., Leipzig 1986, S. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Franz Kafka, *Der Process*, Berlin 1925, S. 60.

<sup>11</sup> „Der ‚Phonographen-Ton‘“, in: *PZ 3* (1902), H. 34, S. 344–345.

<sup>12</sup> Julius Bergfeld, „Phonograph und Publikum“, in: *PZ 3* (1902), H. 10, S. 119–120.

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Lothar, *Die Sprechmaschine: Ein technisch-aesthet. Versuch*, Leipzig 1924.

<sup>14</sup> „Das Studium der Nebengeräusche“, in: *PZ 4* (1903), H. 20, S. 277–278.

<sup>15</sup> Max Chop, „Nebengeräusche, Obertöne, Reinheit der Stimmung und Reinheit der Sprechmaschinen-Aufnahmen.“, in: *PZ 8* (1907), H. 24, S. 594–595.

<sup>16</sup> Gauß, *Nadel, Rille, Trichter*, 2009, S. 281.

<sup>17</sup> „Aus Paris“, in: *Altonaer Nachrichten* vom 12. Juli 1878.

<sup>18</sup> „Grammophon-Konzert im Beethovensaal“, in: *PZ 4* (1903), H. 15, S. 219–223.

<sup>19</sup> Max Chop, „Der Wettstreit der Pressluftmaschinen“, in: *PZ 10* (1909), H. 8.

<sup>20</sup> „Wettstreit der Brüllmaschinen“, in: *Berliner Tageblatt* vom 26. Februar 1909, S. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Vgl. Peter K. Burkowitz, „Die Entwicklung der Aufnahme-Praxis und die akustische Wahrnehmungs-Revolution um 1930“, in: *The Lindström Project: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Schallplattenindustrie*, hrsg. von Pekka Gronow und Christiane Hofer, Bd. 4, Wien 2012, S. 6–12.

<sup>22</sup> Theodor Lessing, „Der Lärm. Eine Kampfschrift gegen die Geräusche unseres Lebens“, in: *Grenzfragen des Nerven- und Seelenlebens*, hrsg. von Leopold Loewenfeld, Bd. 9, Wiesbaden 1908.

<sup>23</sup> Luigi Russolo, Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann, „Die Geräuschkunst“, in: *Futurismus. Geschichte, Ästhetik, Dokumente*, hrsg. von Burghard König, Hamburg 1993 (= rowohlt's enzyklopädie), S. 235–241.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Elste, „Hindemiths Versuche ‚grammophonplatten-eigener Stücke‘ im Kontext einer Ideengeschichte der Mechanischen Musik im 20. Jahrhundert“, in: *Spiel (mit) der Maschine. Musikalische Medienpraxis in der Frühzeit von Phonographie, Selbstspielklavier, Film und Radio*, hrsg. von Marion Saxer, Bielefeld 2016 (= Musik und Klangkultur).



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