

# *“Technically excellent, musically deficient.”*

## *A case study of the Hungarian sound recordings of The Gramophone Company made in 1911<sup>1</sup>*

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The EMI Archives, founded in 1996 and located in Hayes, west of central London, near to the former buildings of The Gramophone Company, preserves a significant part of the written, audio and visual documents of the history of EMI (Electric and Musical Industries). This invaluable collection includes a large number of documents related to Hungary. In 2019 and 2020, with the support of the Media Science Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and as a holder of the Richard Taylor Bursary of the City of London Phonograph & Gramophone Society, I managed to process an unparalleled collection of documents of The Gramophone Company's Budapest Branch in the EMI Archives. The Hungarian boxes of the EMI Archives are mostly incomplete; however, the two boxes with the inscription “Budapest, 1911” are full of documents which cover almost the whole year. In the first part of the present article, I will give an overview of the 1911 activity of The Gramophone Company's Budapest branch, and in the second part I will discuss the documents related to the recording sessions of 1911, including a highly interesting correspondence regarding the aesthetic appraisal of the early musical sound recordings. For reasons of length, I do not address legal and technical issues (such as patents, players and their accessories) in this article.

The Hungarian documents kept at the EMI Archives are highly valuable, since this kind of material did not survive in Hungary; the Hungarian office of the HMV was partly nationalized in 1949 and its own archive papers do not exist today, while the archive documents connected to the Hungarian Branch kept at the Budapest City Archives contain mainly papers of the registry court.

### **1. The Budapest Branch of The Gramophone Company in 1911**

The first Hungarian record store connected to The Gramophone Company was opened in 1902, as a subsidiary of H. Weiss and Co. Berlin, which distributed gramophones and Lambert typewriters.<sup>2</sup> In 1904, The Gramophone Company registered its General Agency in Hungary and opened its own store in Budapest, Kossuth Lajos u. 8.<sup>3</sup> In two years, the General Agency became the most important record dealer in Budapest and the Hungarian half of the Monarchy.<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Conrad worked at the Budapest branch from the beginning

of its business, and in May 1907, at the age of 31, he became the Executive Director of the General Agency.<sup>5</sup> Based on the sources, Conrad was able to effectively manage the not-so-large agency of the international record company in Budapest, and he organized several recording sessions every year in the territory belonging to him. In the middle of 1911, an exciting opportunity arose for him: the management of The Gramophone Company suggested placing the company's Vienna branch under the control of Heinrich Conrad from the following year.<sup>6</sup> According to their proposal, the day-to-day running of the Budapest business was to be taken over by his brother, Friedrich Conrad,<sup>7</sup> who was five years older than Heinrich. Friedrich had been working for the company with his younger brother since 1906 as an assistant and travelling agent.<sup>8</sup> As early as 1913, Friedrich Conrad became the managing director of the Hungarian General Agency,<sup>9</sup> and remained in this position until his death in 1925.<sup>10</sup> However, Heinrich Conrad also remained in contact with the Budapest branch until his death. His career after 1911 could be cleared with the help of the papers of the Vienna boxes at the EMI Archives. He died in a car accident in January 1938 in Vienna.<sup>11</sup>

The two boxes marked “Budapest 1911” contain documents of various kinds. Letters sent from different departments of the Head Office in carbon copies, and original copies of letters sent from Budapest, partly typewritten and partly handwritten, usually on ornate letterhead. At the beginning of 1911 Heinrich Conrad wrote in German and later in English, and English-language abstracts were added to the German letters in the Head Office. In addition to the letters, telegrams have also survived. It seems that the Budapest General Agency was, at least partly, under the control of the Berlin office, led by Leo B. Cohn, who was not only the head of the continental trade of The Gramophone Company, but, from 1909 on, also a board member of the Budapest branch.<sup>12</sup> The correspondence often concerned the Berlin subsidiary of The Gramophone Company, and Berlin also received a copy of certain letters, but it also happened that the answer to a question from London was sent from Budapest to Berlin. However, in most cases Heinrich Conrad wrote directly to Hayes.

There was a lot of correspondence between the Head Office and the Budapest branch; several letters were sent from both

directions every day. Although the existing letters from 1911 cover the entire calendar year, it is clear that not all documents have survived, and, unfortunately, the lists and accounts attached to the letters were generally not preserved either. However, in many cases, missing information can be inferred from the related letters.

On the basis of the correspondence, the responsibilities of the director of the Budapest General Agency can be compiled.

(1) Communication with the Head Office in London, later moved to Hayes. Heinrich Conrad had to send regular reports on the sales of records and gramophones, on the sale statistics of Celebrity records and records by performers contracted with a special royalty, or even on the stock. The introduction of the double-sided disc opened up new possibilities that needed to be regulated: in November 1911, the Head Office notified the Budapest branch that they might ask for discs in special couplings to suit local customers, and the only thing which had to be taken into account was that only one side of the record could contain a recording of a performer with special royalty.<sup>13</sup>

Among the many official correspondence, there are some very interesting topics. In September 1911, as a sign of the international institutionalization, The Gramophone Company decided to establish a museum archive. The request was also sent to the Budapest branch: the Head Office wanted to collect documents, objects, early newspaper advertisements related to the history of the gramophone, the very first records of any factories and other similar relics.<sup>14</sup> Heinrich Conrad's reply shows that the Hungarian General Agency itself collected memories of its past: "We are in a position to pass you a specimen of the most obsolete type of Gramophone which is likewise hand driven. We can as well send you a supply of the very first records without labels, the titles of the records being engraved on same. We possess also a complete collection of all printing matters which have been edited since existence of our Budapest business, except a few ones which are of less interest."<sup>15</sup> These really valuable objects and documents were sent to the United Kingdom on September 16, 1911,<sup>16</sup> but on October 6, they received a reply that the package had still not arrived in Hayes.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have further information on the fate of this item.

(2) Handling matters regarding the territory of the General Agency, which, in the case of Budapest, initially meant Hungary, Dalmatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In mid-1911 Bulgaria and Romania were added to the territory of the Budapest branch.<sup>18</sup> However, Conrad, referring to (unspecified) experiences gained during his trip to Bucharest, notified the Head Office that he could not undertake the latter, so Romania was returned to the territory of Berlin.<sup>19</sup>

One of these matters presented itself, for example, when Sándor Kégl (1862–1920), a significant Hungarian orientalist, asked for recordings in Hindustani language, supposing that, since this language was prospering that time in the United Kingdom, there should be discs for language teaching.<sup>20</sup> In other cases, H. M. Taylor [sic] inquired about sound recordings in Ruthenian language,<sup>21</sup> or Baron Alfonz Weiss de Csepel (1890–1985, son of the famous industrialist Manfréd Weiss) asked Heinrich Conrad to arrange a complete Hungarian catalogue to send to A. B. Weiss, Trinity College, Cambridge.<sup>22</sup>

Conrad forwarded the inquiries to Head Office; which had to inform him that there were not Hindustani discs in the repertoire of the company. Furthermore, the Head Office regularly forwarded inquiries regarding Hungarian gramophone discs, for example, from the Netherlands<sup>23</sup> or from the United States ("Send a complete Hungarian Zonophone catalogue to The Universal Talking Machine Manufacturing Co, 4<sup>th</sup> & Race Streets, Philadelphia, Pa.").<sup>24</sup>

(3) Matters of the employees of the store and the branch in Budapest. From 1911 we know the names of five Hungarian employees besides the two Conrads. The Head Office decided in the middle of the year to send an English accountant to Budapest. Certainly, the company's goal may have been to gain a better understanding of the business of the Budapest branch. However, the 28-year-old Frank A. Carter resigned after a few weeks. His resignation letter to his contact in Hayes, W. H. Cooper, shed a particular light on Budapest at the turn of the century: "I have given the matter careful consideration and taking into account the utterly unpleasant & depressing nature of the city. Coupled with the extraorbitant cost of living. I am unable to come to any other decision."<sup>25</sup> It was not an easy task to find a substitute for an accountant in Budapest in the middle of the summer in England. Although the Head Office asked Carter to stay until October,<sup>26</sup> he had already taken a job in London starting in September,<sup>27</sup> so the Budapest business was taken over by the former accountant Miksa Halmos and his assistant.<sup>28</sup>

(4) Utilization of business opportunities in their own territory, primarily in Budapest. In early July 1911 a good opportunity presented itself for promoting the gramophone in Hungarian schools, with the support of the competent ministry.<sup>29</sup> Conrad informed the Head Office in a hurry because of competition (that is, the *Első Magyar Hanglemezgyár*). He even negotiated with somebody, more or less in secret, but decision-making at Hayes and in the Hungarian ministry was a slow process in the middle of summer. Ultimately, it seems, this matter was important only for Heinrich Conrad and soon the opportunity was gone.

(5) The General Agency was responsible for the proper advertising activity on its territory. Partly as recommended by the centre, partly according to their own ideas, they tried to reach the widest possible customer base. One of the most special promotional materials of 1911 was the so-called 'Puzzle Plate', which contained more songs in parallel/concentric grooves on the same side. Although the Puzzle Plate is referred to as a new invention in the correspondence, the company actually made a Puzzle Plate as early as 1899. As Peter Adamson informed me, these records were produced as a casual release, for example, a two-sided Puzzle album was released by The Gramophone Company for the centenary of Giuseppe Verdi's birth.<sup>30</sup> On the occasion of the Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary (22 June, 1911) the company also produced a Puzzle Plate, which was apparently a success, as the Head Office offered to release another issue before Christmas, this time internationally, if the branches thought such a record might be of interest in their territory.<sup>31</sup> Heinrich Conrad responded enthusiastically, considering the special disc to be an excellent Christmas novelty, and wrote that the Hungarian audience would prefer a Puzzle Plate in Hungarian, for which

the recordings could be made at the next recording sessions.<sup>32</sup> In response, the centre asked Conrad to pre-select the musical pieces for the Puzzle Plate according to the following criteria: “We would suggest three short pieces of a popular nature in a different style – for instance, one humorous song, one concerted operatic excerpt, and one band piece.”<sup>33</sup> It is not known whether such a disc was actually made for Hungary, but I have not come across such a record so far, and we do not find any reference to this in the data of the sound recordings made in October 1911.

1911 also brought important changes to the advertising business of the whole company: a new Advertising Department came into operation in July, in Hayes.<sup>34</sup> From then on, the company’s advertising activities were noticeably centralized. On 18 July, 1911, a demanding, colourful German company catalogue was sent to Budapest with the remark that it should be taken as a reference in the future.<sup>35</sup> A few days later, Budapest was ordered to standardize the format of future promotional materials: the size of the catalogues as well as the design of the covers.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in mid-July the Advertising Department called on Heinrich Conrad to send a copy of the Hungarian newspapers in which the General Agency published an advertisement, of course, at the expense of the Budapest branch.<sup>37</sup>

(6) The most important task of the Chief Representative was to organize the recording sessions of his own territory. This work alone, without the activity detailed above, would have provided enough work for even more people. The correspondence reveals all phases of the work: the first task was to find and contract artists suitable for recording. The next was to organize the recording tours, which were particularly problematic: the schedule of the recording expert from abroad was set by the Head Office; this had to be coordinated with the schedule of the performers. The recording expert sometimes spent only a few days on site, and for these few days the performers had to be organized, preferably so that sound recordings of the best possible quality could be made in a short time. The Chief Representative was also responsible for organizing the trip, covering the costs and fees of the recording expert, and, long after the sound recordings had been made, examining the quality of the test records.

In 1911, four recording sessions were made in the organization of the Budapest branch: in January in Budapest, in April in Zombor (today: Sombor, Serbia), in July in Budapest, Eszék (today: Osijek, Croatia) and Zagreb, and in October in Budapest, Belgrade and Sofia. Of these, from the point of view of musicology and media history, the correspondence related to the third session, in July 1911, is particularly interesting. Through this correspondence we can gain an insight into the contemporary music listening habits and the aesthetics of early sound recordings in a special Hungarian musical repertoire.

## **2. Recording sessions of the Budapest Branch in 1911**

### **2.1. Budapest, 26–27 January, 1911. Recording expert: Franz Hampe (matr. 12068L–12083L)**

The first recording session lasted a very short time, only two days. On 26 and 27 January the sound engineer Franz Hampe,<sup>38</sup> who regularly returned to Hungary, made a total of

16 sound recordings and then travelled to Berlin. Preparations for this recording session were apparently made in 1910. As no letter dated in Budapest from these two days survives, Conrad was presumably present at the recordings and gave all possible help to Hampe. These recordings were issued in July, based on press releases from the Budapest Branch.<sup>39</sup>

### **2.2. Zombor (today: Com̂op/Sombor, Serbia), 20–21 April, 1911. Recording expert: Franz Hampe (matr. 12263L–12292L)**

The second recording session of 1911 again lasted only two days, and the sound engineer was again Franz Hampe. The preparation of the sound recordings coincided with the increase of the territory of the Budapest Branch, mentioned above. In addition to the unexpected journeys related to this, Conrad had many troubles because he had failed to reconcile the schedule of the artists selected for recording and that of Franz Hampe. Already on 21 March, he wrote to Will Gaisberg that since he could only travel to Bucharest after 1 April, it would be enough for Hampe to arrive in Budapest only on 15 April.<sup>40</sup> Gaisberg immediately notified Hampe, who, as is made clear from Conrad’s reply, immediately contacted Conrad. Hampe modified his schedule so that after completing his recordings in Vienna, that is, after 8 April, he travelled to Prague to make recordings with Karel Burian (matrix numbers 12259L–12261L).<sup>41</sup> On 12 April, Conrad was already able to write to Will Gaisberg that recordings would begin on 19 April, and he would need the recording expert for 8 to 10 days; however, since Easter fell on April 16–17 that year, he suggested that some of the recordings should be postponed due to the absence of the artists.<sup>42</sup> At this time, Conrad still thought it possible to organize a recording session in Bucharest, but, as mentioned above, he eventually returned the entire territory to Leo B. Cohn because of the conditions he had experienced in Bucharest.

A particularly valuable document is the letter of Franz Hampe to Will Gaisberg, written in Zombor from the Hotel Jägerhorn, on a letterhead of the Hungarian Branch of The Gramophone company on 19 April 1911.<sup>43</sup> Hampe described that Friedrich Conrad had been waiting for him in Budapest because Heinrich Conrad had had to travel to Fiume (today: Rijeka, Croatia) for business reasons. It seems that only then had it become clear to him that the planned recordings would not take place in Budapest, but in Zombor. In the case of the Zagreb and other recordings, he also confirmed that they could not be made due to the absence of the artists, but that Friedrich Conrad said they could take place around May or June 1911. The recording session in Zombor thus began only on 20 April, and a total of 30 orchestral recordings were made in two days, after which Hampe travelled to Berlin.

### **2.3. Budapest, Eszék (today: Osijek, Croatia) and Zagreb, July 1911. Recording expert: George Walter Dillnutt (matr. ak1–ak192)**

The next recording session, organized by Conrad, took place in July 1911, when not only the sound expert but also the selected artists were finally available for a longer period of time. Presumably at that time they rescheduled the cancelled recordings of April, since, at this time recording sessions took place in Zagreb and Osijek as well.



Matrix number	City	Date
ak1–57	Budapest	July 1911
ak58–105	Eszék (Osijek)	26 July to August 1911
ak106–192	Zagreb	Before 20 August 1911
from ak193	Drama (Δράμα, Greece)	From 21 August 1911

*Recordings made by George Walter Dillnutt in July and August 1911*

The starting date of the recordings made in Budapest is currently unknown, we only know that on 4 July, 1911, Conrad asked for 8,000 crowns from the Head Office as recording expenses.<sup>44</sup> The sessions began, but this time the Head Office caused a lot of inconvenience to Conrad. On 7 August, recording expert George Walter Dillnutt was ordered to travel to Greece, but Franz Hampe, who was offered as a replacement to continue the interrupted recordings, was not free until 20 August.<sup>45</sup> It is obvious that this would have caused approximately two weeks in the already fixed timetable of the sound recordings to have been lost. Therefore, the recording session was interrupted after 192 recordings made in Budapest, Eszék and Zagreb (matrix numbers: 1ak to 192ak, all 10" recordings), and Franz Hampe did not continue Dillnutt's work in the end.

However, Conrad seems to have done well not to have Dillnutt make any more recordings in his territory in the summer of 1911, as there were several problems with the sound quality of the recordings made in Budapest at that time. After listening to the test pressings, Heinrich Conrad noted his objections to Leo B. Cohn, who forwarded them to the Head Office.<sup>46</sup> The test recordings were rated in Hayes particularly good. In his answer, Will Gaisberg, head of the Gramophone Company's Recording Department, stated that "we have had sample records sent us from Hanover [sic] and we have carefully gone over some, and it has been the general opinion of the whole Recording Staff that the Zigeuner orchestra records made by Dillnutt are exceptionally good. We do not pretend to be a better judge of Zigeuner records than you are, and I will therefore be pleased, if you will send me the numbers to London, which you think are not a good work."<sup>47</sup> Conrad answered in a detailed letter to Will Gaisberg, and, significantly, not only gave the numbers, but also referred to older recordings he thought were worth comparing to the new ones.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, his letter provides a rare opportunity to gain insight into the aesthetics of the acoustic recording era, as well as what the experts listened to while checking the test recordings. Since some of the recordings involved in the case have survived, Conrad's objections can also be examined today. Although we cannot listen to the discs on a contemporary gramophone under contemporary acoustic circumstances, and listening to a 110-year-old surviving copy is not comparable to the test recording being placed on the gramophone for the first time, the empirical study still provides relevant results. In order to examine the comparisons of Conrad and Gaisberg, Ákos Solymosi, the sound engineer of the Music Department of the National Széchényi Library in Budapest, digitized the sound recordings without sound res-

toration and without changing the initial settings.

Recording expert George Walter Dillnutt was not a beginner: he was already present during the Far Eastern recording sessions of 1902–1903, and since then he had mostly worked in the Far East.<sup>49</sup> From mid-1908 to 1910 he was the resident recording expert of The Gramophone Company in India. However, the first time he made recordings in Europe was in 1911,<sup>50</sup> which presumably became a major factor in the failure of the Hungarian recordings. After 1915 he returned to India. His 1911 Hungarian recordings consist of typical Hungarian repertoire: 17 recordings of the gypsy orchestra of Béla Berkes; 9 or 10 recordings of Vilmos Jäger performed on *tárogató* (a special Hungarian instrument) and accompanied by an orchestra; 4 recordings of a Hungarian singer performing Hungarian folk-inspired art songs; and 22 or 25 recordings of the orchestra of the K. u. K. infantry regiment No. 23, including the Hungarian National Anthem, some Hungarian *csárdás* arrangements, a Hungarian Rhapsody by Ferenc Liszt, an overture by Béla Kéler (popular Hungarian composer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), the overture of Ferenc Erkel's opera *Hunyadi László* and some international ragtimes.

Conrad's most important criticism of the gypsy orchestra recordings concerned the overall sound of the orchestra. The core of a gypsy orchestra is the ensemble of violins, cimbalom and double bass, and, around the turn of the century, a clarinet also joined the melody instruments. In Conrad's opinion, it was not enough for the sound of the instruments to come through clearly, it was also necessary to be able to reproduce on the records the style of performance typical of gypsy bands.<sup>51</sup> To illustrate the difference between the previous good recordings and the new ones, he recommended to the Head Office recordings not only of Hungarian music but also of international salon pieces, performed by gypsy orchestras, recorded in 1909. In his opinion, the new recordings were not only generally quieter than the old ones, but the balance of the instruments was inappropriate, as the clarinet was in the foreground instead of the violin, and the bass was barely audible. In the new sound recordings, the sonority was upside down: the clarinet lead the sound, while the violin almost disappeared, and it was as if the clarinet was accompanied only by the cimbalom and the viola.<sup>52</sup> These objections can be clearly proved for today's listeners as well. In the former recordings the sound is indeed lead by the violin, and the more audible presence of the bass also increases the space of the sound recording. By contrast, in the recordings made in the summer of 1911, the sound of the clarinet usually comes to the fore, and the bass is barely audible.

The instrument called "*tárogató*" was very popular around the turn of the century, considered to be a traditional Hungarian woodwind instrument of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Being an instrument connected to the "*kuruc*" era of the Hungarian history, it carried the context of the Hungarian national identity, and its popularity increased in the 1890s and 1900s. In fact, the *tárogató* of the nineteenth and twentieth century has nothing to do with any old instruments – for example, the old *tárogató* was a single-reed instrument, while the new *tárogató* has double-reeds; it was invented by Vencel József Schunda (1845–1923), a Hungarian instrument maker of Czech origin, around the late 1880s.<sup>53</sup> Regarding the *tárogató* recordings, Conrad raised two problems: the new recordings

sounded duller than the old ones, and if they were played with a metal funnel, the funnel reverberated.<sup>54</sup> For a comparison, he recommended listening to the *tárogató* recordings made in 1907. Unfortunately, we can hardly examine these objections in today's circumstances. In the 1911 recordings, the accompaniment usually sounds very weak; however, when the *tárogató* is not playing, the band's voice is louder, presumably the members of the band moved towards the funnel. The sound of the *tárogató* is indeed dull in some, but not all, recordings, and in some cases, it is ostensibly out-of-tune. In the former recordings the tone of the *tárogató* is much brighter, and its dynamic range is significantly wider.

In the case of the military orchestra recordings, Conrad primarily objected to the volume: the volume of the new recordings, he said, was generally lower than that of the old ones. To illustrate this, he also selected pieces from several genres: in addition to Austro-Hungarian military marches, he also drew the attention of the Head Office to *csárdás* and international popular dance recordings. Volume is, of course, a subjective factor, especially because we cannot listen to the records on a contemporary player. However, the available military orchestral sound recordings made in July 1911 can indeed be said to be quieter than even the *tárogató* recordings digitized in the same way. On the other hand, the sound spectrum is rich, for example, on the recording of *Toncsi* by Albert Hetényi-Heidlberg (G.C.70434, matr. 40ak), the carillon is not only audible but also sounds beautiful. Conrad drew special attention to the recording with matrix number 39ak, which is an imaginary scene of a guard mounting with a military band, playing the March from Ferenc Erkel's opera *Hunyadi László* (G.C. 70433, matr. 39ak). He emphasized that the band played the March at full volume during the recording, while it is barely heard on the record. (Although, this raises the question of where Conrad listened to the recording session from, since the beginning of the recording "depicts" a military band approaching the venue. Consequently, the sound is initially very low on the recording but, obviously, the band played with normal dynamics.) As a comparison, he suggested listening to a recording of the same March, from 1908 (G.C. 70292, matr. 4213r). Today's listener may agree with Conrad; it is hard to believe that this recording, which sounds quieter than usual, would be the sound of a full-range military band.

As a result of Conrad's letter, Will Gaisberg asked for the recommended sound recordings for comparison from Hannover.<sup>55</sup> After listening to them, he did justice to Conrad in some cases: "I have received samples of the records which you recommended me to hear and compare to previous recording[s], and, in some cases, agree with you that the previous recording is better than this, to the extent that the Expert who made the records was more familiar with the effects which your territory needed, in the placing of the orchestra."<sup>56</sup> However, in his opinion, the sound quality of the new sound recordings was generally better than that of the old ones: "The actual tone of the recording I should say is better."<sup>57</sup> Perhaps it was the reason why the recordings were published in spite of Conrad's opinion. Nevertheless, Gaisberg offered to send Franz Hampe, who often visited Hungary, to Budapest during the autumn to make more recordings.<sup>58</sup>

As Dillnutt's later recordings, made in Germany, show, the

sound expert did not make a "mistake" in his recordings in Budapest, but consciously experimented with new settings. As Christian Zwarg argued, it often happened in the case of the company's earlier, louder sound recordings, that the needle popped out of the groove, damaging not only the needle itself but also the disc. Probably to remedy this problem, Dillnutt tried to make sound recordings that are lower in volume but at the same time sound clear and transparent, consequently the bass of the recordings was much less present in the sonority, which generally results in a narrower space of the sound.<sup>59</sup>

#### 2.4. Budapest, Beograd and Sofia, 13–25 October, 1911.

Recording expert: Edmund James Pearse  
(matr. 2853ae–3076ae)

In the end, it was not Franz Hampe but Edmund James Pearse who arrived in Budapest in October 1911. Heinrich Conrad was specifically asked by the Head Office to inform the sound expert in detail about the special sound of Hungarian music and to show him some of the orchestral recordings made earlier. Franz Hampe was also asked to share his previous experience in Budapest with Pearse in order to make recordings as good as what Hampe had made in the past: "Now, Edmund Pearse is a first-class expert, but, as you know, has not recorded in Budapest before. This means that if you want to get the same effects in your records as previously, you must thoroughly explain to the expert the nature of the work, and let him hear samples of previous band and orchestra work. You know quite well that all experts are using the same tools and there is no reason why they should not each get the same effect. I am writing a letter to Franz Hampe, and also to Pearse, explaining that I wish them to exchange ideas on the Budapest recording so that Pearse will get the same effect that Fred and Hampe did when doing your recording. I am writing to the others by this same mail so that there should be no further trouble over this recording. I wish you to listen carefully to all the tests that the expert makes, and if you think he is not getting the effect that you want, please send me a wire."<sup>60</sup>

At the beginning of October, Edmund Pearse made sound recordings in Riga, from where he travelled to Budapest via Warsaw.<sup>61</sup> He began recording on 13 October in Budapest, then continued working for Conrad in Belgrade and Sofia.

Matrix number	City	Date
2853ae–2936ae	Budapest	13–25 October 1911
2937ae–3006ae	Beograd	1–5 November 1911
3007ae–3076ae	Sofia	13–16 November 1911

*Recordings made by Edmund James Pearse in October and November 1911*

Conrad received the test recordings in mid-November and expressed his gratitude to Will Gaisberg in an enthusiastic letter on 20 November: "My Dear Mr. Gaisberg, I have heard the samples of Mr. Pearse's work in Budapest and must to say [sic] how pleased I am with it, for without exception it is excellent[.] I am sorry that up to the present I have not had such records, for I am sure I could have done better business. Well [sic] you please try and arrange so that I always have records as good in future. I sent my best regards to you, and I remain your very truly, H. Conrad."<sup>62</sup> Will Gaisberg received Conrad's



letter with satisfaction, assuring him that the sound recordings now made would be considered standard in the future.<sup>63</sup>

To be honest, although the recordings made by Edmund Pearse turned out better indeed than that of Dillnutt, they do not bear out Conrad's enthusiastic words. In the gypsy orchestra recordings, the violin is to be heard better, but the bass is not significantly stronger. Recordings of military orchestra and tárogató were not made in the autumn of 1911. From the other sound recordings made at this time, it can be stated that in the vocal and spoken sound recordings the text is to be understood very well, and the sound is usually clear and transparent.

This correspondence testifies not only to the responsibility of the Executive Director of a General Agency, but also the relationship of Will Gaisberg and Heinrich Conrad. At the time of this correspondence Conrad knew that he was in a good position in the organization of The Gramophone Company. According to the documents he was in a good, even friendly relationship with the Gaisberg brothers: he met Will Gaisberg in March 1911 in London, and after that he visited Fred Gaisberg, who was still convalescing after an accident, in Berlin.<sup>64</sup> It characterizes their relationship that, at the end of the month, he even sent some candies to the daughters of Will Gaisberg and some fruits to Fred.<sup>65</sup> In July and August Conrad was in an initiator role during the correspondence concerning the promotion of the gramophone in Hungarian schools mentioned before. And it was in the middle of August 1911 when he got to know that he had been chosen to take over the Vienna branch,<sup>66</sup> and because of that he visited Fred Gaisberg in Berlin again. In these circumstances he obviously felt that he and his opinion were taken seriously.

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the director of the Hungarian branch managed to achieve that the Hungarian recordings performed by gypsy orchestras, military orchestras and tárogató were listened to and compared to each other at the Head Office of The Gramophone Company. And from their correspondence, we can also learn more about the aesthetics of the sound recording of the era.



Fig. 1. The first advertisement of The Gramophone Company in Budapest, *Magyar Nemzet*, 8 October 1899.



Fig. 2. Advertisement of the new store of The Gramophone Company in Budapest, *Budapesti Hirlap*, 8 May 1904.



Fig. 3. Jean Gilbert: *Die keusche Susanne - Waltz*. Performers: Béla Berkes and his gypsy band. Concert Record Gramophone G.C.-70756, matr. 6ak.



Fig. 4. *Ha beverik az én szőke fejemet, csárdás*. Performers: Béla Berkes and his gypsy band. Concert Record Gramophone G.C.-70761, matr. 18ak.





Fig. 5. Eredeti Rákóczi nótá. Performers: Band of the Royal and Imperial Regiment No. 23., conductor: Sándor Szeghő. Concert Record Gramophone G.C.-70442, matr. 57ak.



Fig. 6. Hetényi-Heidberg Albert: Toncsi. Performers: Band of the Royal and Imperial Regiment No. 23., conductor: Sándor Szeghő. Concert Record Gramophone G.C.-70434, matr. 40ak.



Fig. 7. Őrség felváltás. Performers: Band of the Royal and Imperial Regiment No. 23., conductor: Sándor Szeghő. Concert Record Gramophone G.C.-70433, matr. 39ak.

## Notes, Reference Periodicals, Newspapers and Books

<sup>1</sup>The research was supported in 2019 by the Media Science Research Group of the Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and in 2020 by the CLPGS Richard Taylor Bursary. During the research period the author was research fellow at the Archives for 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungarian Music, Institute for Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities. Beyond the support of the Media Science Research Group, the author offers his thanks to all of the colleagues and institutions who helped him in the research: Joanna Hughes (EMI Archives, curator), Balázs Mikusi and Ákos Solymosi (Music Department of the National Széchényi Library), Peter Adamson, Klára Bajnai, Susana Belchior, Anna Dalos, Pekka Gronow, Peter Marland, Kata Riskó and Christian Zwarg. I especially offer my thanks to Ágnes Lux for her help with the English text. Unfortunately, Alan Kelly (1928–2015), the great researcher of the history of The Gramophone Company, cannot read this article, which could not have been created without his recollections about the former archives of the EMI, told to the author in June 2013. – In the notes I refer to the letters uniformly, indicating the sender and the recipient (if the exact person is not known, only the city name) and the date. In order to accurately identify the original documents, I also provide the original reference number in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup>The date of the registration order of "Weiss H. és Társa" at the Budapest Court of Justice is 2 December, 1902. *Központi Értesítő XXVII/99* (11 December, 1902), 1900.

<sup>3</sup>Budapest Court of Justice, 7 October, 1904. *Központi Értesítő XIX/88* (3 November, 1904), 1646.

<sup>4</sup>On the basis of an editorial response, see: *Az Ujság IV/195* (18 July, 1906), 16. See a whole-page advertisement of the branch shop: *Budapesti Hírlap XXVI/62* (4 March, 1906), 41.

<sup>5</sup>The name of Heinrich Conrad appears in the sources in different versions: Heinrich or Henrik, Conrad or Konrád, in Hungarian or in international order. I write his name uniformly as Heinrich Conrad.

<sup>6</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Hayes, 18 August, 1911 (31419).

<sup>7</sup>GC Joint Managing Director – Heinrich Conrad, 15 September, 1911 (35002). Like his brother, Friedrich Conrad is mentioned in the sources in different ways (Friedrich/Frigyes, Conrad/Konrád). I use his name uniformly as Friedrich Conrad.

<sup>8</sup>See the document with the registration number 66496 among the Hungarian documents from 1907 of the EMI Archives.

<sup>9</sup>Budapesti Czim- és Lakásjegyzék. Huszonötödik évfolyam. 1913. (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1913), 611.

<sup>10</sup>See the death rumour of Friedrich Conrad: *Az Ujság XXII/48* (27 February 1925), 14.

<sup>11</sup>See the obituary of Heinrich Conrad: *Esti Kurir XV/21* (27 January 1938), 3.

<sup>12</sup>"die Budapester Leitung unter Leitung des Herrn Cohn steht." London – Budapest, 20 March, 1911 (10967), Appendix 4, a letter from Leo B. Cohn (Berlin) to Jean Feder (Bucharest), 18 March, 1911.

<sup>13</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 6 November, 1911 (45114).

<sup>14</sup>Head Office Advertising Department – Budapest, 1 September, 1911 (32319).

<sup>15</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Hayes Head Office, Advertising Department, 9 September, 1911 (34243).

<sup>16</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Hayes Head Office, Advertising Department, 16 September, 1911 (49776).

<sup>17</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 6 October, 1911 (40217).

<sup>18</sup>London – Budapest, 16 March, 1911 (10799).

<sup>19</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Sidney W. Dixon (Managing Director, London), 12 April, 1911 (15552); Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 12 April, 1911 (17839).

<sup>20</sup>Budapest – London, 4 February, 1911 (5822).

<sup>21</sup>London – Budapest, 4 February, 1911 (4962).

<sup>22</sup>Heinrich Conrad – London, 6 February, 1911 (6513).

<sup>23</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 16 November, 1911 (48258).

<sup>24</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 4 September, 1911 (32835).

<sup>25</sup>Frank A. Carter – Hayes, 11 July, 1911 (30505).

<sup>26</sup>London – Frank A. Carter, 9 August, 1911 (29248).

<sup>27</sup>Frank A. Carter – Cooper, 11 August, 1911 (30504).

<sup>28</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Hayes Accounts Department, 21 November, 1911 (50155).

<sup>29</sup>Budapest – Hayes, 3 July, 1911 (28983).

<sup>30</sup>Strangely, Puzzle Plate is the only term in English that has retained the word "plate" for the record. The word "plate" was replaced by "record" in English usage around 1901–1902. I have to offer my thanks to Peter Adamson for his comments on my presentation at the virtual conference of the Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger in 2021.

<sup>31</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 5 September, 1911 (32910).

<sup>32</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Hayes, 16 September, 1911 (35406).

<sup>33</sup>Hayes – Heinrich Conrad, 19 September, 1911 (35747).

<sup>34</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 17 July, 1911 (25405).

<sup>35</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 18 July, 1911 (25302).

<sup>36</sup>Head Office Advertising Department – Budapest, 28 July, 1911 (26735).

<sup>37</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 14 July, 1911 (24791).

<sup>38</sup>About recording expert Georg Franz Hampe (1879–1947) see the Recording Pioneers website: [http://www.recordingpioneers.com/RP\\_HAMPE1.html](http://www.recordingpioneers.com/RP_HAMPE1.html) (Accessed on 10 December, 2019).

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, *Pesti Hírlap* XXXIII/161 (9 July, 1911), 51. and *Az Újság* LX/163 (12 July, 1911), 24.

<sup>40</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 21 March, 1911 (12038).

<sup>41</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 28 March, 1911 (13072).

<sup>42</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 12 April, 1911 (17839).

<sup>43</sup>Franz Hampe (Sombor) – Will Gaisberg, 19 April, 1911 (15999).

<sup>44</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Hayes, 4 July, 1911 (24401).

<sup>45</sup>Will Gaisberg – Heinrich Conrad, 17 July, 1911 (25239).

<sup>46</sup>Will Gaisberg – Heinrich Conrad, 2 September, 1911 (35138).

<sup>47</sup>Will Gaisberg – Heinrich Conrad, 2 September, 1911 (35138).

<sup>48</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 4 September, 1911 (47300).

<sup>49</sup>Alan Kelly: *The Gramophone Company Catalogue. 1898–1954*. CD-ROM, 2002. See the files *FWG-E.doc* and *MAT106-Introduction\_nop.doc*.

<sup>50</sup>About recording expert George Walter Dillnutt (1883–1937) see the Recording Pioneers website: [http://www.recordingpioneers.com/RP\\_DILLNUTT2.html](http://www.recordingpioneers.com/RP_DILLNUTT2.html) (Accessed on 10 December, 2019).

<sup>51</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 4 September, 1911 (47300).

<sup>52</sup>"Sie werden finden, dass 1./ die neuen Aufnahmen leiser als die früheren sind, 2./ dass das Instrument die Klarinete bei diesen Aufnahmen das führende Instrument ist, wogegen bei unseren früheren Aufnahmen – und wie es auch richtig ist – die Geige das führende Instrument ist. Bei den Neuaufnahmen ist von Bass gar nichts zu hören; hingegen bei den älteren Aufnahmen ist es direct verblüffend. Auch ist die Harmonie der älteren Platten eine ganz andere wie die Neuaufnahmen. Dadurch, dass die Klarinete das führende Instrument ist, verschwindet der Effect der Geige und die Platten klingen so als würden dieselben blos mit Cymbal, Klarinete und Viola aufgenommen sein." Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 4 September, 1911 (47300).

<sup>53</sup>About the *tárogató*, see the bilingual (German and Hungarian) volume: Zoltán Falvy – Bernhard Habla (eds.): *A tárogató. Történet, akusztikai tulajdonságok, repertoár, hangszerkészítők. Das Tárogató. Geschichte, akustische Merkmale, Repertoire und Instrumentenbauer*. (Budapest – Oberschützen: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, Pannonische Forschungsstelle, 1998).

<sup>54</sup>"Die Neuaufnahmen Seriennummer 57, 20, verglichen mit den Katalognummern 109405/6 werden Ihnen sofort einen grossen Unterschied aufweisen, indem die Neu-Aufnahmen dumpf klingen und speciell mit Metalltrichter gespielt, diesen zu starken Vibriren bringen, hingegen die früheren Aufnahmen gespielt vom selben Künstler, derartige Defectes nicht aufweisen." Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 4 September, 1911 (47300).

<sup>55</sup>Hayes – Heinrich Conrad, 7 September, 1911 (33759).

<sup>56</sup>Will Gaisberg – Heinrich Conrad, 3 October, 1911 (39173).

<sup>57</sup>Will Gaisberg – Heinrich Conrad, 3 October, 1911 (39173).

<sup>58</sup>Will Gaisberg – Heinrich Conrad, 3 October, 1911 (39173).

<sup>59</sup>I have to offer my thanks to Christian Zwarg for his comments on my presentation at the virtual conference of the Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger in 2021. At the suggestion of Pekka Gronow, I made a spectrum analysis using *Sonic Visualizer* software. The result of the analysis confirms both the contemporary opinion and the findings of Christian Zwarg. The comparison of two Gypsy band recordings (1909 and 1911) and two military band recordings (1908 and 1911) resulted in the following: Gypsy band: *Tout passe Waltz* (1909): 93Hz–3280Hz; *Die keusche Susanne Waltz* (1911): 93Hz–3400Hz. Military band: *Hunyadi March* (1908): 93Hz–2300Hz; *Hunyadi March* (1911): 93Hz–3000 Hz. This suggests that sound recording technology improved between 1908/1909 and 1911. However, the overall sound quality has not improved, but this is a question of the style of Hungarian music.

<sup>60</sup>Hayes – Heinrich Conrad, 6 October, 1911 (39309).

<sup>61</sup>Hayes – Budapest, 9 October, 1911 (39764).

<sup>62</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, 20 November, 1911 (49594).

<sup>63</sup>Hayes Recording Department [Will Gaisberg?] – Heinrich Conrad, 24 November, 1911 (49519).

<sup>64</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Will Gaisberg, Berlin, 16 March, 1911 (11311).

<sup>65</sup>"The sisters were delighted with the *bons-bons* which you sent them. It was most kind of you. I also received letter from Fred telling me of the lovely fruit which you sent him." Will Gaisberg – Heinrich Conrad, 31 March, 1911 (13074).

<sup>66</sup>Heinrich Conrad – Hayes, 18 August, 1911 (31419). Source of the labels: National Széchényi Library, Budapest.