

LUCKY CHARM RANCH Bisbee, Arizona

EDISON IN MEXICO, 1904-1912: A PRELIMINARY STUDY. - by L. E. Andersen.

About the Author...

My interest in Mexican music began during the War when a friend gave me an album, "A Program of Mexican Music," of orchestral and choral performances conducted by Carlos Chávez: It still remains in my library, OPA ceiling prices neatly listed inside its back cover. The records are worn nearly to pieces, but the interest they sparked has grown far beyond my expectations.

During part of my Los Angeles residence in the 1950's I lived in the barrio. All my friends including my fiancée were Mexican; here I learned Spanish and spoke it almost exclusively, gaining along the way an insight into the Hispanic culture which later broadened into full appreciation and respect.

Cylinders of Mexican music acquired through my membership in the Santa Monica Society of Early Recorded Music greatly heightened my interest. Even now I remember the stirring performances of the Banda Flamenca Gascón, and the poignant strains of "Allá, cuando era Niño" as sung by Sres. Abrego y Picazo; to this day I play it on the piano, though the record is long gone.

The die truly was cast when Ray Phillips let me have a precious but fragmented Húgen y Acosta cylinder which, when reassembled, proved no less than a performance by legendary flamenco artist El Mochuelo! Living later in the Chicago Cuban community, I mentioned this to my elderly landlady, a former Canary Islander; she paled and sat down with tears in her eyes. In hushed tones she asked, "You... heard... El Mochuelo?" As a girl she had seen him perform, but never had heard his name since.

My interest waned during subsequent years amongst English speakers, but reawakened when I had occasion to travel in Mexico and Guatemala, particularly on attending concerts of La Banda Estatal de Oaxaca which transported me back to pre-Revolutionary times. Needless to say, my move to southeast Arizona where my little ranch is but a few miles from the border brought matters full circle: Two years ago I began serious research on Edison's 2-minute cylinders.

Ironically, acquisition of a large lot of these from the same Ray Phillips, still active in the fraternity, has enabled me to begin writing on the subject: I believe that to write competently on recorded material, one must live with it and hear it.

My data, though adequate for this preliminary study, are by no means sufficient for a major detailed work which I plan in future. Therefore I must appeal to you, my readers and fellow researchers, for any literature, Mexican catalogs, 2-minute cylinders or other pertinent material which I would gladly purchase or request to borrow if not already in hand, hoping meanwhile that this initial essay will help bring the subject to the fore.

EDISON IN MEXICO, 1904-1912: A PRELIMINARY STUDY.

For my friend RAY PHILLIPS, and my wife MARY BETH SUTOR, without whose help this work would not have been possible. - L. E. Andersen.

Edison's first major recording venture in Mexico was not based on mere speculation; nor was the National Phonograph Company the only one to discover that Mexico offered a market for talking machines and records. By 1904 the firm and its predecessor North American had been selling their products in Mexico through agents and importers for roughly a decade, and found the situation promising enough to make a major commitment.

Ralph Cabañas, National's Mexico representative, returned to Mexico City in the spring of 1904 after conferencing at Orange, to supervise installation of a "record plant" at No. 7 Calle Colón, across the street from the United States consulate. Completion was announced in June, as was the "taking of selections of Mexican vocal and instrumental music, executed by the highest class talent in the country."

Recording engineer and expert George J. Werner was sent from Orange to supervise the process; the masters or "proofs" as they sometimes were called were sent back to Orange where moulds were made from them and records manufactured from the moulds. These records then would be sold in Mexico and the United States: Though Mexico was intended as the major market and Cuba secondary, the Edison Phonograph Monthly later would point out the importance of "...States bordering on Mexico, which have a considerable Mexican population."

Thus was established the routine National would use in Mexico for the next several years: A recording "field team" would come from Orange, hold sessions for up to a few months, then return home with a large number of master cylinders for processing there.

In Mexico the wise businessman did not forget the necessity of good "connections," and the approaching birthday of Presidente Porfirio Díaz on 15th September offered a golden opportunity to make political hay. On the 14th a gala press reception was held for much of the afternoon in the salons of the Colón Street headquarters, in which El Presidente's intended birthday gift, an "entirely gold-plated" phonograph in a "beautiful golden box," was exhibited.

On it was inscribed in Spanish: "Special Phonograph presented by Thomas Alva Edison to his Excellency Señor General Porfirio Díaz, President of the United States of Mexico, September fifteenth, nineteen hundred and four."

What truly captivated the reporters, however, was the "proofing," that is, playback, of master cylinders made earlier on the premises. Werner operated the apparatus, amazing the newspapermen with the "naturalness" of its sound, especially in staged bullfight scenes. Then the attendees were invited to view recording styli-- real sapphires! -- under a microscope; and some even

were permitted to record in the studio and then listen to the "incomparably genuine" results with the rest of the audience.

It was a master stroke. The following day, the papers were full of enthusiastic stories about the occasion, eulogising the recorded performances of various artistes such as popular tiple (soprano) Soledad "Chole" Goyzueta and celebrated Mexican poet Juan de Dios Peza-- and, of course, the bullfight scenes. With this heady accompaniment, the actual presentation took place.

With the golden phonograph came an assortment of the new Gold Moulded Mexican cylinders and a formal letter from Thomas Edison. Sr. Cabañas was introduced to El Presidente with great ceremony by General Powell Clayton, the United States ambassador to Mexico, and received after the presentation a personal letter of reply to Edison from Díaz almost lugubrious in its elaborate prose.

So far, National had met with total success: The Mexican operation was off and running; in four months Werner and his staff had secured 303 matrices encompassing a wide variety of talent; and now, the timing and press coverage of the ceremonies had capped the whole affair most beautifully. No-one realised that the seventy-four-year-old Díaz, credited with much of Mexico's material progress and standing as a nation in the XIX Century, in less than seven years would be forced to resign and flee to Spain; or that shortly afterward the Edison wax cylinder itself would vanish.

Production of the new Mexican records at Orange was hurried as quickly as possible, and before the year was out large numbers were reported to have been sold in Mexico. The market also continued to demand popular U.S. marches and ragtime, and Mexican jobbers and dealers did exceptionally well.

Often the music of the two cultures intermingled: As one example, the "cakewalk" in Luís G. Jordá's zarzuela (musical comedy or operetta) Chin-Chun-Chan is actually "A Bunch of Blackberries," written around 1900 by Tin Pan Alley's Abe Holzmann! A rather ponderous rendition by La Banda de Zapadores de México is heard on Edison 18793.

Pre-revolutionary Mexico was sharply divided economically, with mostly wealthier families purchasing complete phonograph outfits. The average peón rarely could aspire to such luxury on an individual basis, although friends or neighbours might combine finances, perhaps even an entire small village; or the poor could of course hear the newfangled entertainment in cantinas or other business locations. More enterprising individuals, however, would buy or borrow a machine and tour the region with "shows," some even on donkey-back, in hopes of successfully passing the hat amongst the listeners in Indian village or local zócalo (town square). Thus there always was a market for records.

NEXT ISSUE: Mexican Edison artistes; the 1907 and 1909 recording expeditions; El Presidente makes a record; collapse of the U.S. market; and cross-over list matching 1200-series Blue Standards with original wax-issue numbers

EDISON IN MEXICO, 1904-1912: A PRELIMINARY STUDY (Concluded). -by L.E. Andersen.

The 1904 sessions offered much unfamiliar subject matter and technical challenge. Vocalists must be individually recognisable to a public who knew them mainly from the theatre. Exaggerated enunciation and horn gymnastics were routine to U.S. "recording artists," but many Mexican stage performers, initially at least, had to be taught these bizarre techniques from scratch.

Bands emphasised reeds, and orchestras were most or all string. No Stroh could rescue Werner here: the Orquesta Típica Lerdo of pianist-composer Miguel Lerdo de Tejada featured piano, a flute, and a melange of exotic strings. Another pianist-composer, Luís Jordá, led from the keyboard the other members of his quintette: two violins, 'cello, and harmonium. First violin was José Roabrana, whose genuine Andrea Amati had cost him three thousand dollars.

Guitars and the archaic lutelike bandúrria must retain their unique voices. Mandolins were familiar ground but cockfight sounds were not. Werner and his staff superbly captured these and an incredible variety of folk, concert and operatic singers, vocal and instrumental zarzuela (light opera or musical comedy) selections, traditional and formal instrumental work, poetry and recitations, religious choruses and more in a true sound picture of Mexico.

Edison Phonograph Monthly listed these for U.S. dealers in three installments, January, March and June 1905; beginning with florid praise, later cautioning of small demand "except in States closest to Mexico," and finally limiting them to Foreign, Numerical and Mexican/Cuban Catalogues. National habitually pushed its dealers to stock foreign records for potential foreign-speaking customers and "regulars" desiring quality music not conventionally listed "one needn't speak Italian to enjoy opera." Nevertheless, in November 1907 most Mexican records were relegated to catalogues printed for use in Mexico.

Dealers objecting to thus losing access to popular selections were told in March 1908 that a list was available on demand from the Foreign Dept. But in Sep. 1905 Foreign Dept. manager Walter Stevens described Mexico as "one of the best talking-machine countries there is." By November a near-100% business increase was reported, and in July 1907 EPM observed "the country is growing wealthier in a manner that has no precedent... where a year ago one Record was bought, two are bought to-day and three will be to-morrow."

Under climatic and travel conditions often hostile to fragile wax cylinders, as many as two thousand phonograph exhibitors were reported traveling throughout Mexico, while home demand grew as well. In January 1906 the Mexican National Phonograph Co. was incorporated in New York State with Mexico City headquarters at 67-77 Calle Prolongación del Cinco de Mayo which soon proved too small: In December a four-storey building at 117 Avenida Oriente was leased instead, containing recording, jobbing and business facilities.

Werner and a second expert, F.C. Bart, returned to Mexico City in March 1907 for a second recording marathon, returning in three months with "nearly 200" masters. EPM initially listed only thirteen for U.S. dealers, but good Mexican sales were expected for "operatic selections by famous Mexican singers, pretty dances and instrumental pieces... famous bands..." and the like.

A severe earthquake struck on the night of 14th April. "Our representatives," noted EPM, "escaped with no damage and a large fund of anecdotes," although water spilled from rooftop tanks into the building below. Fourth floor recording facilities miraculously were spared. Werner, returning on a street-car from the American Circus, "found himself sitting on the knees of a lady to whom he had not been introduced. (She) would not wait for his apologies but rushed with the rest of the frightened passengers for the door."

Burt "was writing at his hotel when the floor began to move, the walls to wriggle and the ceiling to follow suit. He made a leap for the stairs and found they were behaving curiously. Every occupant of the hotel assembled in the streets, fearing a repetition of the San Francisco disaster... the only calm individual was an intemperate gentleman who assured his fellow guests that moving stair cases, heaving floors and trembling walls were phenomena of such usual occurrence with him that he paid no attention to them.

If Mexican earth shook, National's market there did not. But in the U.S. it still pushed its dealers for "a greater interest in Foreign Records" with pleas from General Sales Manager F.K. Dolbeer and a new Foreign Catalogue of 924 selections including 38 Mexican. The U.S. Mexican market didn't budge.

On 1st January 1908 Cabañas joined the Foreign Dept. in New York and was replaced as Mexican National manager by L.L. Lewis, formerly in charge of International Correspondence School's Language Study Dept. at Chicago's major music house of Lyon & Healy; ICS and National were long-time partners.

Werner and Burt made their last 2-minute cylinder recording trip to Mexico City in April 1909, also taking some new 4-minute records which this study does not address. In August EPM announced their return from "our most successful recording trip to Mexico:" high-class performers were emphasised such as harpist Rita Villa, cellist Luís Rocha, concert and operatic singers, and Rocabrana in three soli besides his usual ensemble work. About 180 masters were made "under the personal supervision and criticism of Sr. Arturo Rocha, assistant director of the Conservatorio Nacional de Música y Declamación, México."

In mid-August, about a month before his 79th birthday and in advance of a planned meeting of the Mexican and U.S. Presidents, Porfirio Díaz himself waxed a reply to Thomas Edison's invitational letter on the same machine Taft had used to record campaign speeches before the 1908 election. Placed on sale in mid-October, the cylinder marked "the first time that a ruler of a great Nation has made a Record of his own voice for distribution in this manner. Its message, in Spanish, reflected El Presidente's friendship and admiration for the inventor; copies for U.S. sale came with a bilingual flyer.

But an era was coming to an end. The old revolutionary-general-politico was forced to flee to Spain in 1911, dying there in 1915. Mexican wax cylinders briefly reappeared in EPM from January 1910 to September 1911; then in November 1912 all wax save a few British and European selections were replaced by the new Blue Amberol. A short 1912-13 issue of perhaps less than a hundred 2-minute Mexican Standard Azúl (Blue Standard) appears to have died a-borning. The history of both 2- and 4-minute Blue types I must leave to others.

The 1904 through 1909 2-minute Edison Mexican cylinders are a mile-stone in the history of recorded sound, both in superb technical achievement and in the preservation of a vital culture much of which later would change or be altogether lost. For this reason I hope to publish a full comprehensive study of the subject in future, to which this small essay is but a prelude. Any assistance, especially literature or the records themselves, would be appreciated most deeply.

ARTISTS ON EDISON MEXICAN 2-MINUTE CYLINDERS. (* = Found on 1904 recordings.)

MALE VOCALISTS:

Jesús Abrego, Tenor.*
 José Aparicio
 José Ruiz Becerra, Tenor.*
 Rafael Bezares, Tenor.
 Pablo García Bofil, Tenor.
 Francisco Cascales, Tenor;
 "El Sevillano."
 Félix de la Sierra, Tenor.
 Porfirio Díaz, Pres. of Mexico.
 Francisco "Paco" Gavilanes
 Rafael Herrera Robinson, Baritone.*
 Asunción Hermosa, Bass.*
 Adolfo Jiménez, Tenor.
 Leopoldo Gutiérrez Lara, dram. actor.
 Felipe Llera, Baritone.*
 Rafael López, Baritone.*
 Ismael Mazaña, Tenor.
 Manuel Romero Malpica, Baritone.
 Paco Martínez, Baritone.
 José Torres Ovando, Baritone.*
 José María Palma, Baritone.*
 Juan de Dios Peza, Poet.*
 Leopoldo Picazo, Baritone.*
 Maximiano Rosales, Tenor.
 Braulio Rosete, Tenor.*

VOCAL GROUPS:

Coro; Coro Mixto (also listed as
 Sexteto Mixto.)*
 Cuarteto Coculense.
 Cuarteto Chiapaneco Solis.
 Cuarteto Mixto.*
 Varios Artistas (Descriptives.)*

ACCOMPANISTS:

Sra. Rincón, Guitar.*
 (Others also likely.)

INSTRUMENTAL SOLOISTS:

Joaquín J. Arriaga, Bandúrria/Mndln.*
 Sr. Obscura, Guitar/Bandúrria.*
 José Rocabruna, Violin. (*ensemble)
 Luis G. Rocha, Violoncello.
 Srta. Rita Villa, Harp.
 Octaviano Yañez, Guitar.

FEMALE VOCALISTS:

Srta. Concepcion Beraud, Soprano.*
 Srta. Sofia Camacho, Soprano.
 A. Delgado, Soprano.
 A. Delgado, Soprano.
 Sra. Esperanza Dimarias, Soprano.*
 Srta. Beatriz Franco, Mézzo-soprano.*
 Sra. Soledad "Crole" Goyzueta, Soprano.*
 Grifell
 Sra. Matilde Herrera, Soprano.*
 Esperanza Pastor, Soprano.
 Srta. Emilia Sánchez, Soprano.
 Juana Ramón, Soprano.
 Sra. María Sedano, Soprano.*
 Srta. Emilia Vergueri, Soprano.
 Sra. Modesta Zamudio, Soprano.*
 Sra. Lerédo, Soprano.

Incompletely or not identified:

J. Delgado
 Haro
 Paris
 Pastor (Tenor?)
 Plaza
 Vivanco

INSTRUMENTAL GROUPS:

Banda de Artillería, dir. R. Pacheco.
 Banda de Estado Mayor, dir. -?- *
 Banda Concierta Gascón, dir. R. Gascón.
 Banda de Policía, dir. V.V. Pesa.
 Banda de Zapadores, dir. I. Calderón.*
 Orquesta Típica Lerdo, cond. M. Lerdo
 de Tejada, piano.*
 Quinteto Jorda, (also listed as Quinteto
 Jorda-Rocabruna), cond. Luis G.
 Jorda, piano.* with José Rocabruna,
 1st. violin.*
 Trio Arriaga, cond. Joaquín J. Arriaga,
 Mandolin.*

NOTE: An unknown number of cylinders were re-made with same artists, different artists, or different arrangements such as duet instead of solo.

ALL KNOWN 2-MIN. "BLUE STANDARDS" ARE MADE FROM 1904/07/09 MASTERS AS FOLLOWS:

1201=18506	1213=20352	1225=18592	1238=18638	1251=18724	1264=20015	1276=20253
1202=18507	1214=18525	1226=18593	1239=18640	1252=18725	1265=20047	1277=20269
1203=18508	1215=18526	1227=18594	1240=18673	1253=18726	1266=20064	1278=20289
1204=18510	1216=18527	1228=18595	1241=18674	1254=18727	1267=20159	1279=20311
1205=18511	1217=18529	1229=18596	1242=18675	1255=18728	1268=20171	1280=20317
1206=18512	1218=18531	1230=18597	1243=18713	1256=18750	1269=20186	1281=20320
1207=18515	1219=18533	1231=18598	1244=18714	1257=18751	1270=20187	1282=20324
1208=18517	1220=18534	1232=18599	1245=18715	1258=18796	1271=20194	1283=20342
1209=18517	1221=18535	1233=18600	1246=18716	1259=18797	1272=20235	1284=20356
1210=18518	1222=18536	1234=18633	1247=18720	1260=20011	1273=20239	1285=20363
1211=18519	1223=18537	1235=18634	1248=18721	1261=20012	1274=20243	1286=20366
1212=18523	1224=18538	1236=18635	1249=18722	1262=20013	1275=20245	1287=20369
		1237=18636	1250=18723	1263=20014		

1904 SERIES 18501-18803, 1907, 20000-approx. 20195, 1909, approx. 20193-20374.

Nouveau Pathéphone " DUPLEX "

Système breveté S. G. D. G.

Modèle à Deux Pavillons

L'appareil comprend :

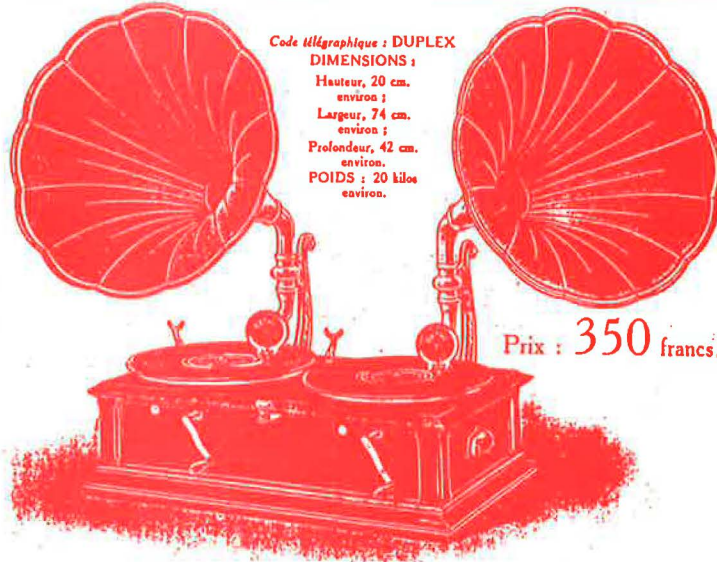
- Une boîte façon acajou.
- Deux bras acoustiques perfectionnés grand modèle.
- Deux Pavillons fleurs, recourbés, N° 526, d'environ 48 cm. de diamètre.
- Deux Reproducteurs PATHÉ-CONCERT extra-légers, à saphir inusable.

Le nouveau Pathéphone " DUPLEX ", qui permet d'écouter les disques de toutes dimensions dans les mêmes conditions que les Pathéphones ordinaires, a l'avantage de pouvoir jouer nos nouvelles séries de disques THÉÂTRE-COMPLET.

Cet appareil permet de reproduire sans aucune interruption toute une suite d'enregistrements, en donnant une audition d'une continuité parfaite.

Avec le nouveau Pathéphone " DUPLEX ", c'est enfin la réalisation d'un désir qu'hier encore l'on croyait impossible de demander au Phonographe : le Théâtre chez soi.

Avec le Pathéphone " DUPLEX " à pavillons l'on dirige les sons dans la direction désirée en tournant les pavillons sans déplacer l'appareil.



Code télégraphique : DUPLEX

DIMENSIONS :

Hauteur, 20 cm.

environ ;

Largeur, 74 cm.

environ ;

Profondeur, 42 cm.

environ.

POIDS : 20 kilos

environ.

Prix : 350 francs.

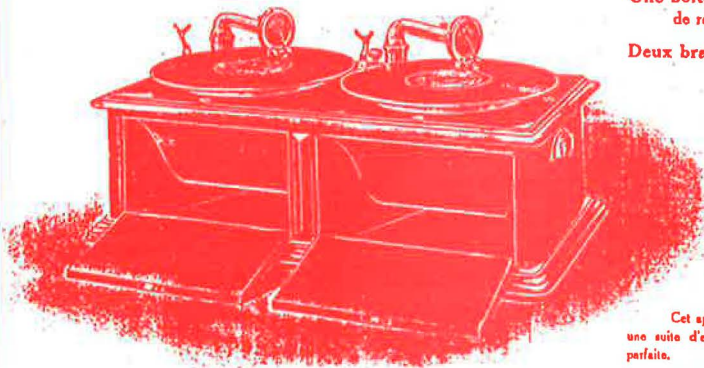
Cet appareil est muni de la mise en vitesse instantanée, système breveté S. G. D. G., qui permet d'obtenir immédiatement la vitesse à laquelle l'appareil est réglé.

From Pathé's 1912 phonograph catalogue came this prophetic but premature idea of dual turntables for which specially sequenced sets of discs were offered including more-or-less complete operas which thus could be played without interruption. Broadcast stations would revive the concept many years later. Of extra interest is the use of the phrase "at home" in describing domestic use of the Modèle sans Pavillon (hornless model).

Nouveau Pathéphone " DUPLEX "

Système breveté S. G. D. G.

Modèle sans Pavillon



L'appareil comprend :

Une boîte grand luxe façon acajou, à double caisse de résonance, avec portes et couvercle mobile.

Deux bras acoustiques perfectionnés.

Deux Reproducteurs
PATHÉ-CONCERT,
extra-légers, à saphir inusable.

Le nouveau Pathéphone " DUPLEX ", qui permet d'écouter les disques de toutes dimensions dans les mêmes conditions que les Pathéphones ordinaires, a l'avantage de pouvoir jouer nos nouvelles séries de disques THÉÂTRE-COMPLET.

Cet appareil permet de reproduire sans aucune interruption toute une suite d'enregistrements, en donnant une audition d'une continuité parfaite.

Avec le nouveau Pathéphone " DUPLEX ", c'est enfin la réalisation d'un désir qu'hier encore l'on croyait impossible de demander au Phonographe : le Théâtre chez soi.

Le Nouveau Pathéphone " DUPLEX " sans pavillon est l'appareil idéal pour les auditions " at home ".

DIMENSIONS
Hauteur, 38 cm. environ (couvercle compris) ;
Largeur, 85 cm. environ ; Profondeur, 44 cm. environ.
POIDS : 22 kilos 500 environ.

Prix : 350 francs.

Code télégraphique : DUALIS

Cet appareil est muni de la mise en vitesse instantanée, système breveté S. G. D. G., qui permet d'obtenir immédiatement la vitesse à laquelle l'appareil est réglé.

Submitted by: L. E. Anderson