

WEST OF ENGLAND GROUP MEETING, West Huntspill, 14th September 2019.

On a perfect late summer afternoon we gathered at the home of Alastair and Jane Murray for Alastair's presentation "Bring on the Girls : The good, the bad and the ugly." These terms referred to the "girl's" lifestyles and choice of repertoire as well as to their physical appearance.

As each record was played on Alastair's fine Expert Senior gramophone, pictures and biographical details of each artist were circulated among the guests. Alastair had also created a display featuring every one of the 24 "girls" in his presentation.

Among the records which most impressed your reporter were "Dusky Stevedore" by Thelma Terry and her Playboys, "Dance Creole" by the child pianist Adelaide Newman on Sterno 1463, and the elderly Vesta Victoria who came out of retirement to record an "Old Time Medley" for Regal in 1931. The 1928 hit "Fancy our meeting" was beautifully sung by Lillian Davies, and the Swedish singer Zara Leander, once dubbed the Diva of the Third Reich, sang "Kinostar Chanson" on Odeon 04756. When questioned about her performances in Nazi Germany she claimed to have been simply an entertainer working to please an enthusiastic public at a difficult time, but she remained a controversial figure for the rest of her life.

Among the saucier records were "My Handy Man" by Elsie Carlisle on Filmophone 143, "I know that sailors do care" by Tessie O'Shea, "Public Sweetheart Number One" by Florence Desmond, "Three times a day" by Nellie Wallace and "I want to be bad" by Helen Kane, who is said to have been the inspiration for the cartoon character Betty Boop. Returning to respectability Anona Winn, once a protégé of Melba, sang "Zing went the strings of my heart" on Rex 8527.

After enjoying Jane's sumptuous tea and her showpiece garden, member's records were played. On a rare Columbia Grand Opera disc we heard "Mi chiamano Mimi" sung by the four times married Lina Cavalieri, whose scandalous life story was the subject of the film "Beautiful but Dangerous" starring Gina Lollobrigida. Kirsten Flagstad sang "Ich liebe dich", not by Grieg, but the lesser known version by Beethoven. Alice Faye sang the mournful "This year's kisses", then Mary Haynes made us laugh with "Down at our new beauty shop".

All too soon it was time to go. It had been several years since Alastair and Jane last hosted a meeting, but after the success of this one we hope that it will not be too long before they entertain us again.

Roger Mackey.