

Report by Albert Pattison

The Northern Group's late summer session was an American affair with the onus leaning towards the classical field. The first half was devoted to "American Born Singers on 78s" which was presented by Bill Mayers then, after the break for tea and biscuits, members played a selection of American labels.

Bill opened his presentation with Maria Callas's recording of "Qui la voce sua soave" from 'I Puritani' by Bellini then followed with Paul Robson singing "O promise me" from 'Robin Hood'. We heard numbers from Grace Moore and Mario Lanza before we enjoyed a bright interpretation of "Bel raggio lusinghier" from Act 1 of Rossini's 'Semiramide'. This was performed by the soprano Lina Pagliughi who was born in Brooklyn but spent most of her career in Italy, having moved there at the age of 15. She went on to sing in all the major Italian opera centres and even provided the voice over for the Italian film version of 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'.

One of the more familiar tunes was "The White Dove" as sung impeccably by Lawrence Tibbett for HMV in 1930. This was followed by the excellent vocal interpretation of the number from 'Don Carlo' – "Nel giardino del bello sarracin" which was recorded in 1950 by the contralto Blanche Thebom. In another 1950's recording, we heard Richard Tucker perform "Cielo e mar" from La Gioconda by Ponchielli. The tenor died from a heart attack when on tour with Robert Merrill. This occurred whilst he was resting before going on stage in Kalamazoo. We heard Merrill's version of "Mary of Allandale" after hearing the contralto tones of Gladys Swarthout in a number from Samson et Dalila. Eleanor Steber was born in West Virginia and we heard her perform "Depuis le jour" from 'Louise' which dates from 1947. Steber appeared frequently in the radio show 'The Voice of Firestone' which was hosted by Richard Crooks from 1928 to 1945. Bill's session closed with Crooks fine voice stating "How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings". A fine ending to a well appreciated presentation.

With some 20 members present, the second half of the afternoon offered a wider variety of styles although we did start off with Caruso, Abott, Homer and Scotti singing a number from Rigoletto on the Victor label. With 21 tracks played in the session, there's not room to list all the splendid recordings heard. A Musicraft recording gave us "Missouri Waltz" played by Paul Laveell & His String Orchestra whilst Triangle 11436 contained "Copenhagen" by the Golden Gate Orchestra. A selection of WWI songs followed before "I Will Be Home Again" was performed on the Okeh label by Golden Gate Quartet. This was heard on a Decca 66 portable then a Model E Victor horned machine from 1903 was the vehicle for a 7" Climax recording about birds with a somewhat unreadable label. Familiar numbers such as "I wanna be loved by you", "Stranger in Paradise" and "Pretend" were recognized and enjoyed by the gathering.

Belvox 504 gave us "O Mio Fernando" by Marion Anderson whilst, on Gennett 4950, we heard "Y Farm A'I Babann" by the tenor Robert Evans. A different style gave us "If money grew on trees" by Erskine Butterfield who was an American singer and boogie-woogie pianist. His recording was made on 23 October 1941. We stayed in the jazz style with the Broadway Bell Hops who included Bix Beiderbecke and Frankie Trumbauer in their line up on Harmony 504 as they treated us to "There ain't no land like Dixieland to me". "Going back to Smokey Mountain" was a rolling blues number by Memphis Eddie Pee on Globe 103 and a number of further classical style recordings brought the session to a closing number "Anything Goes" by Paul Whiteman's Orchestra. Thanks are extended to the ladies for their supply of tea, coffee and light bites.