

Report of West of England Group meeting at Puddlepool, Devon; 6th May 2017.

Again, a sizeable group of members assembled at the charming house of Nigel and Marilyn Scott, amid spectacular gardens on Exmoor's edge. We were seated in the "Rustic Regal" – a miniature cinema in the loft of the (now operational) water-mill. Nigel's programme was entitled "Shellac on Film" – vintage film clips of familiar recording personalities.

We began with a 16mm film which Nigel had long been seeking – a "March of Time" newsreel of a short (1896-1949) history of the movies. Next we had some musical extracts from feature films; Bebe Daniels & Dick Powell in "You're getting to be a habit with me", and Ruby Keeler & Clarence Nordstrom in "Shuffle off to Buffalo" from *Forty-Second Street*. Then Larry Parks (dubbed by Al Jolson) singing "Carolina in the Morning"; and Artie Shaw and his (vast!) Orchestra swinging through "Everything's Jumping" from *Second Chorus*. We continued with Betty Grable suggestively crooning "Cuddle Up a Little Closer" in 1944.

The next reel began with Judy Garland's famous, energetic "Trolley Song" from *Meet Me in St Louis*; Dorothy Lamour slinking her way through "This is the Beginning of the End" and frantically dancing "Dancing for Nickels and Dimes". Then Bing Crosby crooned and emoted "I Wished on the Moon" from *The Big Broadcast of 1936*; we continued with the peerless Alice Faye in the song standard "Now It Can Be Told" from the film *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, assisted by Don Ameche and Tyrone Power, who (thankfully) did not sing.

It was quite a change of gear to see and hear Mario Lanza in the (colour) film *Seven Hills of Rome*, where he imitated other singers, such as Frankie Laine, Dean Martin and Louis Armstrong, with mixed results.

The most notable rarity, however, was an historic, fascinating, recently-discovered film "Making a Columbia Record". This was in two 15-minute segments, a documentary of the Columbia, (Wandsworth, London), factory, showing the process of record-making. It was made in 1928, thus silent – a year later and it could have been a talkie! Possibly made for trade shows to dealers, etc., by a minor newsreel company? We saw inside the factory with much nickel- and copper-plating, mixing of shellac, electric disc-cutting, and record-pressing by Columbia's famous laminated process. There were also brief shots (at their Petty France studios?) of recording artists Stravinski seriously conducting an orchestra, and Ray (or Al?) Starita frivolously conducting his dance band.

After this, we saw more record-history films; RCA making Victor 78s in 1944, then vinyl (for once, the term used correctly) and stereo LPs in the 1950s.

Appropriately, we heard film on shellac – a 12" Columbia of *The British Film Festival, 1946*. Wartime films included Margaret Lockwood, Phyllis Calvert, Eric Portman, Anton Walbrook and Robert Donat, accompanied by Sidney Torch's Orchestra, so not from the soundtracks, but recorded specially.

We continued quite late, and we earnestly thank Nigel and Marilyn (what a marvellous tea !) for their event.

Paul Collenette.