

## 1907–1947: Forty years of Lindström in Bohemia

01.

For the very first time, products of the **Carl Lindström** were mentioned in advertisements in local papers in Bohemia and Moravia - both countries being a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time - in about 1906. Symptomatically enough, one of the Prague's largest wholesalers offering Lindström's products, boasted as being „a new Czech and Christian shop“ – Christian in the meaning of a gentile, that is: **not** a *Jewish* one.

Till 1914 many Czech wholesalers offered not only a respectful range of talking machines produced by Lindström's Berlin works, but also gramophone recordings on labels of companies acquired - in the meantime - by Lindström syndicate: that is *Beka*, *Lyrophon*, 02. *Dacapo* or *Favorite*. 03. From these recordings, only on *Favorite* label a Czech repertoire of some importance can be found, including a few sides by operatic baryton **Stephan Chodounsky**, historically the very first collector of cylinders and records in Bohemian countries – his vast collection of several dozen thousands of recordings included rarities of the first rank.

After 1910, we can find on the *Favorite Luxus Record* label recordings of the baryton with the *New German Theatre* in Prague **Alexander Haydter**. After 1918, some of these recordings were pressed again on the *Parlophon* label.

Some very important Czech-born artists recorded for labels *Odeon* and *Fonotipia* – 05. let me name for example violinist **Jean Kubelik**, sopranos **Emmy Destinn** and **Berta Foerster-Lauterer**, or tenor **Adolf Krössing**.

In October 1918, as one of results of the Great War, the new Czechoslovak Republic came into the existence. Lindström's labels *Odeon* and *Beka* were the first ones which – already in late 1921 – begun to present an extensive Czech repertoire (followed by *Gramophone Company* in the fall of 1922 only). Ironically – in the light of later political development in my country - the very first recording made in our new Republic, and released at *Odeon* label, 06. was a patriotic song composed by well known Czech singer and comedian **Karel Hašler**: its title was „Don't Worry about the

Bolshevics“. By the way, Karel Hašler was murdered by Nazis in Mauthausen concentration camp in 1942. Should he had survived Nazi era, he surely would have met the same lot just a few years later, when communists came to power in Czechoslovakia in February of 1948.

B. Now a few words about Lindström record labels with Czech repertoire targeted at Czech and Slovak markets...

**07.**

a) Beka

Between 1921 and 1928 the Czech series of catalogue numbers of *Beka* records reached almost five hundred. All these records had the size of 10 inches and up to 70 percent of all recordings pressed at this label, were taken over from the German catalogue of standard *Beka* releases: marches played by **Woitschach Military Orchestra**, salon pieces by **Edith Lorand Orchestra**, dance tunes by **Saxophon Orchestra Dobbrint**, et cetera. On most vocal pieces recorded in Berlin we find voices of mediocre operatic **09.** baryton **Jan Fífka** or similarly sounding tenor **Karel Hruška** – both of them were members of the *Nationale Theatre* in Prague at that period - as all labels usually did not omit to boast about. Recordings made by Czech orchestras and recorded in Prague – usually brass bands of known Czech conductors - included couplets and humorous pieces, military marches, tunes in the folk vein and operetta pieces.

The very last new recordings, destined for Czech catalogue of *Beka* label - originally yellow in colour, later red - were made in March of 1928. Soon after that, some of these recordings were pressed again on red *Parlophon* label. **10.**

b) Odeon

Most of the pre-Great War recordings published originally on brown or blue *Odeon* 27 and 25 cm records were published again after 1921– some of them on decorative labels **11.** with pictures of nymphs and other ethereal beings. Most of these recordings offered Czech catalogues of *Odeon* even as late as in 1930.

As mentioned already, new recordings of Czech artists appeared on *Odeon* green/black 10 inches label since 1921. All vocals were provided by very prolific artist, tenor **Valentin Šindler**. Since 1925, Šindler was used also as a company singer for

*Homokord* label, at the same time he recorded for *DGG*'s export label *Polydor* and his droning voice could be heard also from records of a few others, rather obscure labels.

As to the repertoire pressed at early post First WW *Odeon* label, **12.** till about 1926 it was quite similar to Czech repertoire brought by above mentioned *Beka* label. Green/black *Odeon* label was modernized in 1927 grafically, being the standard dark blue now on. **13.** Also the repertoire modernized quite radically at that time: instead of rather boring comic scenes and „humorous“ speeches, new releases presented recordings of modern dances **14.** sung by artists of the new generation. Aside of releases of records with Czech popular music, for the first time – but also for the last time - appear instrumental recordings of violin player **Ervina Brokešová** and, at the beginning of thirties, airs from operas by Smetana or Dvořák sung by artists of *National Theatre* in Prague **Jaroslav Gleich, Otakar Masák** (not to mistake with **Otakar Mařák!**) or **Nad'a Kejřová**, wife of Masák, were recorded. **15.**

In 1930 *Odeon* released the very first recordings of dance orchestra of composer **Jaroslav Ježek** In 1931, several recordings were made by *Cascade Band* of conductor, singer and composer **R. A. Dvorský**. Both these bands gained enormous popularity in a short time - but, later on, they were recording for *Ultraphon* label only. **16.**

Until 1933, most of Czech vocal pieces of popular music, recorded in Berlin, were made with accompaniment **17.** of the **Dajos Béla Orchestra**, later on, this band to be replaced by the dance orchestra of conductor **Otto Dobrindt**. But on labels of these records we find denomination „dance band“ only – the reason may be rather simple: After 1933, the relations between Germany and Czechoslovakia had deteriorated sharply, thus Lindström people in Czechoslovakia may had been reluctant to advertise the fact, that Czech recordings were accompanied by a German orchestra, and on the top of it, were recorded in Berlin!

**18.** As the probably the strangest recordings, released on Czech *Odeon*, were so called *Psychophonic records* made according the system of a mysterious **Doctor Radwan**. Listening in to the morning record should keep you full of energy during your working hours, while listening in to the night record should force you to immediate sleep. I tried both of these records – needless to say that without any result.

19. Quite busy was the American branch of the Czech Odeon label - even now we can find a lot of American releases made for the relatively strong Czech minority in the USA from matrices recorded in Prague or in Berlin.

The last Czech recordings for *Odeon* label – before it temporarily interrupted its activities in Czechoslovakia – were made in September 1936 in Berlin. By this time the number of all Czech matrices - designated by prefix **Ze** – reached about 2 500. But with exception of about fifty records with symphonic music or operatic airs all other output were just standard „schlager“ of their day.

The dark blue *Odeon* records with new Czech repertoire had been pressed again four years later – for a short time only, during the time of so called *Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren*. In five sessions, organized in Berlin Lindström's studios during 1940–1943, about 100 pieces of popular music with a few Czech singers, accompanied by Otto Dobrindt Orchestra – this time fully mentioned on labels - were recorded. 20. During another recording session for Czech *Odeon* label in August 1941, organized exceptionally in Prague - directly at the stage of *National Theatre*, seven twelve inch records with music of Oskar Nedbal and Antonín Dvořák were recorded with *National Theatre Orchestra*. The very last recording session for Czech *Odeon* label took place in March of 1943 in Berlin.

In years 1945 till 1947, some of these above-mentioned recordings were released again on a slightly different *Odeon* white/blue label. Instead of mentioning the 21. orchestra of Otto Dobrindt on the label, we find the reference to no name „dance orchestra“ here.

Since 1934, the Czech *Odeon* records had been pressed in Ústí – Aussig – in North Bohemia, 22. in the pressing plant of *The Gramophone Company Limited*, on a high quality material with low surface noise levels, thus most recordings have had an outstanding sound quality. During the Protectorate years, records had been manufactured out of synthetic shellac in the synthetic resin processing plant *Baklax*, located in Prague.

c) Parlophon 23.

The implementation of Czech program on the *Parlophon* label realized in 1929 when Czech representation had been taken over by the newly established 24. company

*Novitas*, with headquarters and the retail store in the exquisite arcade location of Wenceslas Square. 25. *Novitas* also took over publishing of the promotional quarterly *Lindström News* 26. which enjoyed its 26th year volume, in 1928.

New series of Czech catalogue numbers started in 1929 and, till 1936, it totaled about 700 published records. 261. About one third of this output presented recordings taken over from standard German *Parlophon* catalogues. 27.

In Czechoslovakia, the *Parlophon* label was presented as something like „A“ label – or a „showroom“ label - of *Lindström Company* during its existence there. Grooves of this label saved voices of many important Czech artists - some of them never recorded for any other gramophone company in the future. 28. From those names, which may sound familiar outside Czechoslovakia, too, let us recall for example operatic bass **Vilém Zítek** (or Guillermo Zítek), tenors **Hans Berlik**, **Otakar Mařák** – or, from the different category, singer and actress **Anny Ondra**, and her film and business partner **Karl Lamač**.

Because of its high-quality Czech repertoire, *Parlophon* records had registered a considerable success on the Czech market, while the two local gramophone companies, *Esta* and *Ultraphon*, presented no serious competition for *Lindström Corporation* - at least not initially. 29. But the economic crisis of 1933 did not escape *Novitas*, which has transformed to a share-holding company in the meantime. Because *Parlophon* had not released any new recordings for some time, many recording artists had gone over to its above-mentioned Czech competitors. 30.

Life of the *Parlophon* label in Czechoslovakia was terminated by the generally same reasons which – in about mid-thirties - terminated life of the most foreign gramophone companies carrying on business in Czechoslovakia: 301. in effort to support the two domestic gramophone companies, the Czech government was again and again loading up new tax burdens on activities of foreign companies, and on import of records from abroad, too. Recording and distribution of Czech *Parlophon* label was terminated at about the same time, as its sister label *Odeon*, it means at the end of 1936. 302.

Records of Czech *Parlophone* had been pressed – together with labels *HMV*, *Gramola*, *Columbia* and *Dixi* - in the *Gramophone Company's* pressing plant in Aussig.

d) Dixi

The sad primacy as label appearing at Czech market for the shortest time ever, holds Lindström's ill-fated *Dixi* label with Czech program. Firstly, this label emerged at the Czech market in 1933, just in the time, when economy was in its deepest crisis. The other reason for complete failure of this cheap departmental houses label can be credited to the fact, that in Czechoslovakia – at that time - there was no tradition of selling records in stores of this kind – in fact, there were practically no big departmental houses there.

31.

The Czech program destined for the dark-green label *Dixi* was recorded in Berlin according to the appointment of a German company running its two departmental stores in Czechoslovakia – one in Aussig and another in Prague. Only in these two stores these records were offered, for dumping price of 10 crowns, which was less than a half of the usual price for records at that time. Denomination „Made in Czechoslovakia“ on label probably just reflected the fact, that these Czech *Dixi* records were pressed in Aussig.

All *Dixi* Czech records – there were only about 35 of them – had the diameter of 10 inches, were recorded between January and November of 1933 in Lindström's Berlin studios and contained popular daily tunes by Czech composers. Two rather mediocre Czech singers – one of them completely unknown, the second one, being of German parentage sung with a slight foreign accent – were accompanied by German dance bands of **Hans Bund**, **Carl Woitschach** or **Bravour Orchestra** – all denominated as „Dixi Dance Band“ on the label.

Similarly, like other labels of foreign gramophone companies in Czechoslovakia, neither *Dixi* was able to survive in the unequal competition environment of that time. Its ephemeral life in Czechoslovakia was definitely terminated by another pronounced import tax burden, imposed by Czech government in the mid of 1933.

e) Homocord (Homokord) 32.

Czech program on this label was very extensive since 1925, when the German mother company *Homophon* joined with *Carl Lindström*. Moreover, since 1923 already, a small pressing plant in Prague was used for production of mechanically recorded

records with *Homokord* label. <sup>33</sup>. The white labels of records had a red *Homokord* sign, blue print on the lower portion of the label, carried the red *Made in Czechoslovakia* sign, appearing even on records that contained recordings from German matrices and were targeted at German market. <sup>34</sup>.

During the twenties, the Czech repertoire on the *Homokord* label was not, in any direction, a progressive one. Prior to 1928, most songs had been recorded by the tenor **Valentín Šindler** <sup>35</sup>. (we mentioned his name with *Odeon* label already). Around 1927, this former member of *National Theatre* in Prague was fired by Lindström on reason of his „voice exhaustion“. Immediately after that we find a new „lyric tenor“ of the similarly bad voice, named **Tonek Sentenský**, on *Homokord* label. This cover name belonged to Šindler's brother Antonín. Also, a matter of interest can be the later activities of Valentín Šindler: in the fifties he emerged again - as a member of communist party already: he was appointed as a „voice adviser“ for an vocal ensemble called „Singing Choir of the State Security Forces“. What an accomplishment for somebody who – already thirty years ago – had suffered of „voice exhaustion“! <sup>36</sup>.

Some *Homokord* releases were pressed on various label of domestic wholesalers, too: <sup>37</sup> let us name here for example *Maraton Rekord*, <sup>38</sup> *Heliofon* or *Rubinton - Voice of artistic World*.<sup>39</sup> With electric recordings came, in 1929, <sup>40</sup> modernized black label and the new general representative and distributor of the *Homocord* record label in Czechoslovakia became **Emil Schmelkes**, who, until 1928, managed Czechoslovakian representation of the German gramophone company *Vox*. <sup>40</sup>.

In the beginning of 1930, the *Homocord* pressing plant in Prague closed down due to its outdated machinery. In 1934, Homocord label disappeared from the Czech market. As of 1932, Lindström transferred all of *Homocord* recordings to the joint catalogues of its other labels *Beka* and *Parlophon*. One year later, these records were offered in the joint catalogue of *Odeon* and *Parlophon*. Until 1936, the releases of *Homocord* electrical recordings had been put on the *Odeon* label under their original catalogue numbers. <sup>42</sup>.

In the middle of 1935, the Czech *Homocord* label was officially removed from the business register. Emil Schmelkes has been immediately recruited into the position of art director by the Czech gramophone company *Esta*.

And now, at least in short, we should mention a few of other Lindström labels oriented at Czech public and distributed in former Czechoslovakia during twenties:

**43.?** Kismet – this label was targeted at consumers in Eastern Slovakia and Ruthenia, that is at people living in non-industrial areas in eastern part of former Czechoslovakia (now this area belongs to Ukrainien). Nevertheless, no authentic Czech or Slovak recordings for this label are known. Lindström just took over recordings from various American matrices recorded by peasants' bands consisting of members of strong Slovak minority in the USA, playing traditional Ruthenian and Slovakian folk songs or delivering humorous speeches.

**44.** Lindström American Record – this label can be described similarly as the above-mentioned *Kismet* label. The only difference be that this label was targeted at people living in Bohemia and Moravia, outside cities and towns - that is, at farmers or peasants. Most of the titles on Czech *LAR* label were recorded in Chicago by local brass bands formed there from members of the strong local Czech community of immigrants.

**45.** Also, a rather minor interest aroused in Czechoslovakia children's labels *Odeonette* and *Lindex* or *Homocord Liliput*, presenting generally nursery rhymes or folk songs in Czech language.

### C. And now, a few stories about Lindström people in Czechoslovakia

Until the mid thirties, *Lindström* could boast with a rather strong position among other gramophone companies in Czechoslovakia. But at that time Czech *Ultraphon* was gaining ground already – with strong support of German *Telefunken*. **46.** Leading position among managers and businessmen in that branch had, since about 1905 already, **Diego Fuchs** (Fuchs is the one on the right...), sometimes called the builder - or founder – of the gramophone industry in Bohemia. **47.** – His strange „Edinofon“ brand on the horn

originally was a never existing „Edisonofon“ 48., which brand-name had to be changed after protests of Edison people. At the beginning of the XXth century, Diego Fuchs worked for *Gramophone Company*, 49. being fired after his attempts to distribute his own labels 50 *Patria* and *Fox*, 51., depicting a fox with one or more gramophones 52. He was sued by *Gramophone company* and lost the trial. His another brand name depicting a fox, 53. was *Praecisonocord*.

In late twenties was Fuchs - as the chief of Lindström representation in Czechoslovakia - elected as the first chairman of the *Gramophone industry and business Union* in Czechoslovakia. But - being of the Jewish origin - he was expelled from this post in the late thirties, his shop was expropriated and Fuchs with his wife and sons 54. was sent to Terezin concentration camp, where, in 1941, was beaten to death by hand of chief of Terezin's Small fortress, SS Hauptsturmführer Jöckel.

Assets of Lindström in Czechoslovakia went, after 1936, under the management of businessman **Vladimír Chmel**, who – together with **Rudolf Pollert**, 55. the last pre-war director of Czech branch of *EMI* – took care also of publishing Czech program on *Columbia* and *HMV* labels. By the way, photograph of Mr. Rudolf Pollert can be seen on page 137 of the large book titled „The first 100 years – EMI“, published about ten years ago, 56. but wrongly is ascribed to British inventor **Alan Blumlein**. Actually, instead of Blumlein is Pollert at the photography. And again, mister Pollert's Jewish origin was the reason why he and his family had not survive Nazi concentration camps.

Only a slightly better fate awaited Vladimír Chmel. 57. After 1945 he succeeded in renewing his representation of *EMI* and *Lindström* activities in Czechoslovakia, and even was able to reissue some of pre-war and war recordings on *HMV* and *Odeon* labels. 58.. But shortly after that came the government decree, nationalizing the gramophone industry in Czechoslovakia. On one hand Chmel was appointed as a so called „national custodian“ for all assets of both *EMI* and *Lindström* in Czechoslovakia, but, on the other hand - and at the same time - he was repeatedly accused, by followers of communists in the government, as the traitor of Czech interests, who strives to pass on the pressing plant in Aussig and other assets of foreign companies back to hands of its former British owners.

Well, this uncertain and contradictory position of Chmel was unsentimentally resolved by the communists' plot in February 1948 – only one day after the victory of

communists, at eight of clock in the morning, Chmel was arrested, put into the jail to await there trail for attempt of malversation. He was sentenced for five years into prison and released prematurely on grounds of his illness, only to die at home shortly after, at the age of 57.

And these few cheerless stories conclude my presentation of Lindström labels **59** and Lindström people in Bohemian countries during forty years between 1907 and 1947.