

Gabriel Gössel

## The Hungarian Connection

Ladies and gentlemen, let me open up my talk today by giving you a rough idea about relations in general between Czechs and Hungarians at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

During the pre-war times of Austro-Hungarian empire, the countries of Bohemia and Moravia actually did not have a common border with Hungary. Most contacts and communications between Czech and Hungarian speaking population took place within units of the military troops. But after 1948, in other words during the last 60 years, both countries were subjected to the same fate, as they became satellite countries of the Soviet empire. But the language barrier between both nations is probably the main reason why, historically, contacts between Czechs and Hungarians were quite rare and by their very nature, rather exceptional. This was true not only in the field of sound recordings, but in other areas as well. In terms of gramophone labels, in the period of time leading up to the Great War, we find all Czech recordings – or more specifically, recordings made by Czech artists – on only one Hungarian label – the *Premier*. Vice versa, any recordings by Hungarian artists or recordings destined for the Hungarian market, we find on two Czech gramophone company labels, *Esta* and *Ultraphon*, but these had not been recorded until the thirties.

After 1950, the reissues of older recordings on the *Supraphon* label, originally destined for Hungary, represent something that could be called an epilogue of this story. So in that spirit, although I've called my presentation today „The Hungarian Connection“, it may be more appropriate to call it „The Weak Hungarian Connection“.

To start my presentation, let me begin by outlining the circumstances under which first sound recordings were made by Czech artists, either home or abroad. The very first recordings were made in the beginning of the XXth century in Vienna. For example, one can recall singer **Franz Pacal**, or in Berlin, the recordings by the tenor **Otakar Mařák**. In Prague, the first recordings came into being thanks to the visit of **Franz Hampe**. This was in 1902. In the

years that followed, numerous foreign-owned gramophone companies operated in Czech lands, most importantly, the German ones.

It wasn't until the fall of 1929, when the first Czech gramophone company *Esta* was founded, and when *Ultraphon*, not yet Czech-owned, published its first Czech recordings. Shortly after that, *Ultraphon* was owned solely by Czechs. After 1945, the gramophone industry was nationalized by the communists. Some older recordings previously made by both of these companies, were reissued on the new export label called *Supraphon*.

So much for the historical connections. And now, let us go back to the year of 1910 and the *Premier* label.

The story of Czech recordings on the colourful label *Premier*, belonging to the *First Hungarian Gramophone Company* – I do not dare to pronounce its Hungarian name – is a rather short one and involves numerous until now not discovered recordings. On the *Premier* label, we find recordings made by Czech artists for the first, and also, for the last time, around the years 1910-1912, in other words, shortly after the founding of this company. Until now, not many Czech recordings had been found on the *Premier* label, but, taking account of the succession of matrix numbers, it is possible that a rather large number of Czech recordings had been made. Sadly, no catalogue of Czech recordings on the *Premier* label was ever found, and nobody knows which dealers took care of distribution of these records on the Czech territory.

In my personal opinion, Czech recordings on the *Premier* label resulted from the initiative of the Vienna branch of this company, which pressed these recordings for a rather large Czech-speaking minority settled in Austria, or Vienna, especially.

The inventory – or program - of Czech recordings on the *Premier* label differs in no way from Czech recordings on labels of other foreign companies, namely, from their German counterparts. On the *Premier* label, most often we find orchestral pieces, comic scenes and operatic airs sung by second-rate artists, while the first-rate artists were hired by *The Gramophone Company* already. The only recordings that are known are those made by artists performing in Prague theaters. But there is one difference between the labels made by German

companies and *Premier* labels: we find heavily misspelled names and titles on almost all *Premier* labels; for example, compare the spelling on the bottom right of this picture.



Sometimes, one can make assumptions about what the correct title is only after the record has been played. In that sense, we can deduce that printing of labels was realized outside Czech-speaking territory and by people not knowing Czech language.

The lowest discovered matrix number of a Premier record with Czech recordings is 7057/7059. This record contains two orchestral pieces from Smetana's opera „Bartered Bride“, played by an anonymous orchestra.

The highest found matrix number is 7439/7440, operatic airs sung by a mediocre Czech operetta singer. In the range between the lowest and highest matrix numbers, we find recordings of comic scenes and salacious speeches of a rather dubious content.

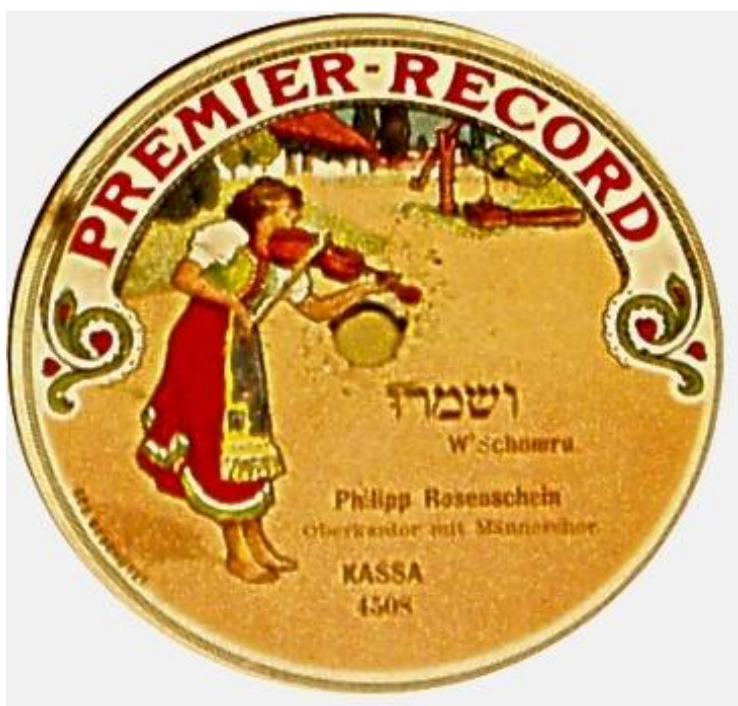
It seems that all Czech recordings were pressed on the 25 cms label only.

Until this time, no Czech recordings pressed on the 27 cms *Premier Hercules* label, had been found.



There are no other details of interest about the rather boring Czech recordings on the *Premier* label. But what I would like to mention is that there may be much more interesting recordings on this label, which were made on today's Slovak territory, governed then by Budapest.

In the archives of the Czech Radio in Prague, I have discovered a few *Premier* records with vocals in Hebrew, sung by the cantor **Philipp Rosenschein** from the synagogue in Košice.



In this town located in the eastern part of Slovakia, called Kassa in German, and Kassavaros - I think - in Hungarian, there had lived an important minority of Jewish population and the town boasted with a big synagogue. To my best knowledge, no other recordings by this cantor on any other labels are known - but I may be contradicted by Dr. Lotz who right now works on discography of Jewish recordings on German labels.

This part of my presentation concludes the story of the *Premier* label producing recordings destined for the Czech speaking audience. As far as I know, no other Czech recordings on any Hungarian labels were produced before the Great War, or during the shellac era pre second world war.

Now let me talk a little bit about *Ultraphon* and *Esta* labels.

Starting in the beginning of the thirties, more contacts have been developing in the field of sound recordings, between Hungary and then already Czechoslovakia. This was shortly after the first two Czechoslovak gramophone companies begun to produce records. The flow of connection was reverse – recordings of Hungarian artists and sometimes whole orchestras were made in Prague, in recording rooms of both of these gramophone companies. As already stated, there have been no Czech recordings made in Hungary destined for the Czechoslovak market, at least from what is known, although I am not sure if there were any recordings made at that time in Hungary and destined for the Slovak market.



Already in October of 1931, singer **Laszlo Moscanyi**, well known by his performance in *The Two Jazzers*, appeared as the first Hungarian interpreter in the recording room of the *Ultraphon* company in Prague. Accompanied by the orchestra of **R. A. Dvorsky** and his **Melody boys**,



Moscányi recorded mere four songs in Hungarian – two pieces from then



immensely popular German revue *Die Blume von Hawaii*, and two foxtrots of Hungarian composers.

These recordings are included in Géza Gabor Simon's Hungarian Jazzdiscography. Ultraphon pressed these recordings on its blue label under the series of catalogue numbers beginning at 4000, which was destined for distribution abroad.



In July of 1932, Mocsányi recorded other ten songs for the Hungarian labels *Weekend* and *Radius*, with accompaniment of an orchestra that appeared on the label as „Harlem Melody Band“. Personally, I have never seen the label *Weekend*, but - thanks to the kindness of Mr. Rainer Künzler – I can show it here now. Matrix numbers of *Ultraphon*, always comprising of five digits, have been renumbered on these Hungarian pressings.



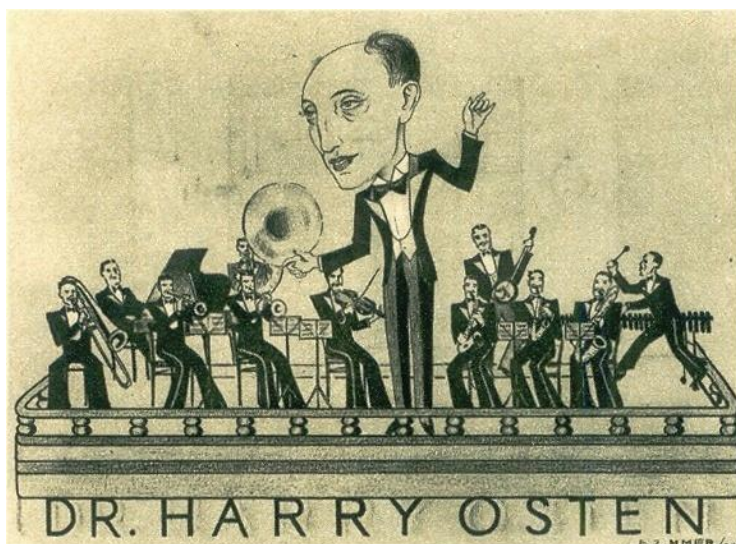
By the way, *Ultraphon*'s recording lists carry a notice that these recordings were destined for



the *Orchestra* label.

The orchestra „Harlem Melody Band“ was a cover name for the dance band of the conductor and composer **Harry Osten**, who, then in 1932, has just moved with his whole orchestra from Berlin to Prague





The proper name of this musician, born in northern Moravia, was Siegfried Grzyb - in Czech language sometimes also Vítězslav Grzyb or Hřib. His band was presented on labels of *Ultraphon* records with Czech recordings as „Alcron Jazz.“ This title was inspired by the exquisite Prague hotel of the same name, where Osten’s band regularly performed during the years of 1932 to 1938.

During the days of July 30 and August 1, in 1932, seven more Hungarian recordings were made in the *Ultraphon* recording room in Prague. Six of these were again sung by Moscányi, the seventh one was performed by the duo **The Two Jazzers**, accompanied again by the Harry Osten’s „Harlem Melody Band“.



On the first October of the same year, **The Two Jazzers** visited the recording room of the *Ultraphon* company for the last time, to record with the Harry Osten's band another 11 pieces, among others, the very well known standard, „Oh, Monah“.

The few above mentioned recordings thus represent all of Ultraphon's output destined for the Hungarian market.

Now I would like to say a few words about the company *Esta*.

Even though *Esta*, the second Czech recording company, produced significantly less records than its financially stronger competitor *Ultraphon*, during the years of 1931 through 1938, *Esta* had a rather extensive program of recordings for Germany and, rather suprisingly, for Hungary. Already in 1931, *Esta*'s recording room hosted Hungarian gypsy band conducted by **Sandor Bura**, who made at least 50 recordings there. During the same year, about twenty more recordings for the Hungarian market were made by *Esta*'s home dance band, conducted by **Aladár Majorossi**, with the singer **József Lipocky**.



Shortly after, twenty more recordings destined for the Hungarian labels *Sternberg* and *Magyar Divat Csarno*, were made by the **Esta Band** conducted by composer **F. A. Tichý**, then the artistic director of the *Esta* company.



In 1932, the **Lyric Band** of Prague conducted by **Adolf Schächter**, made about ten Hungarian recordings.



These recordings were pressed on the Hungarian *Danubius* label.





The same band can also be found on the *Esta* labels with Czech repertoire as „**Lucerna Band**.” This name takes after a night club in Prague of the same name where the band performed then.



By the way, Lucerna palais in Prague was built one hundred years ago by the father of the former Czechoslovak president **Václav Havel**.



Since 1933 till 1938, **Harry Harden** and his orchestra served as *Esta*'s house band





Its conductor was of White-Russian origin. His real name was **David Nunja Stoljarovič** and *Esta* catalogues and advertisements called him „The Czech Jack Hylton“.

*Český Jack Hylton Vám hraje k tanci!*

**HARRY HARDEN**

se svým orchestrem výhradně na deskách „Esta“



7118 <b>VIVERE</b> , slow-fox. C. A. Bixio.	7476 <b>BYL LÁSKY ČAS</b> , waltz.
20 Kč <b>NON DIMENTICAR...</b> , slow-fox (le mé parole) G. D'Anzi.	15 Kč <b>HARLEM LULLABY</b> , blues.
7475 <b>VIOLETTA</b> , tango.	7477 <b>MILÝ HOCHU</b> , swing.
15 Kč <b>ARIANA</b> , tango.	15 Kč <b>STONOŽKA</b> , swing-fox.

**Světové šláгры! Taneční desky beze zpěvu!**

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**Světové šláгры! Taneční desky beze zpěvu!**

In 1934, Harry Harden's band recorded about 30 pieces for Hungarian market with the Hungarian singer **Károly Vajda**. Aside from tangos and Hungarian folk tunes, these



recordings also included swingy foxtrots. Some of them were published on ABC label in Hungary.

During the same year, Prague's recording room of *Esta* also hosted a Hungarian band led by certain **J. Thokely**, with the signer **Josef Cselenyi** who recorded approximately 30 pieces for the Hungarian market.

In 1936, about 60 pieces were recorded for *Esta* by, to this date unknown, Hungarian gypsy band. And the very last Hungarian recordings were made as late as 1938, by the Slovak gypsy band of the well-known conductor **Józka Pihík**, with Hungarian vocals of **Isztván Lenowski**.

Unfortunately, the recording sheets of the company *Esta* had not survived nationalization after 1945. At least three hundred recordings that were not destined for the Czech market, have not been identified to date. Aside from recordings for the German or Austrian markets, most frequently appearing on the *Phönix* label, positively more than one hundred matrix numbers must have been reserved for recordings destined for the Hungarian market.

During the years 1931 through 1938, *Esta* thus produced a few hundred recordings for Hungary. These recordings always had the with the catalogue number prefix H, while recordings in German had the prefix D. The prefix for Czech recordings was E.

The last company I will say a few words about is *Supraphon*.

The interesting story about *Supraphon* concerns its reissues of pre-war recordings after the year 1949. In 1947, communists formed a national, state-owned enterprise called simply „The Gramophone Company“, taking over the former *Esta* and *Ultraphone* companies and placing their matrices on the new blue export label „Lion with Lyre“.



On this Supraphon's „Lion with Lyre“ label begun to be re-issued older recordings, not only those of the above mentioned companies, but also recordings previously made by the German *Odeon*, *Electrola*, *Telefunken* or *Grammophon* companies, which were then considered a „war loot“. It is quite funny to see, for example, a pre-war German *Grammophon* recording on this new *Supraphon* label boasting with denomination Made in Czechoslovakia. These new pressings were allegedly meant to be distributed in East Germany, Hungary, USSR, and other countries of the so called „Peace Camp“.

But most of these reissues made for export, bore tax stamps with price in the Czechoslovak currency on their labels. Considering the fact that the borders between Czechoslovakia and its neighbouring countries were practically shut off at that time, a question remains as to where,

for all practical purposes, these records could have been sold in Czech crowns, would they have been exported - especially since at that time, Czech crowns could not have been exchanged even for Hungarian forints.



But the good thing was that many *Esta* recordings originally made during the thirties for Hungary, were resurrected in one form or another, however, mostly paying the price of low quality. Technically rather poor recordings of **Sándor Bura's** orchestra showed up on the new *Supraphon* label, pressed from the original stampers which, twenty years earlier, were not even chrome-plated. On some labels, original titles can be found in the Hungarian language, on others, they were translated into English, or alternatively, some labels bore titles in both languages.

And one more paradox I would like to point out: this new Czech label *Supraphon*, a cheap label once, was generating similarly cheap recordings now, although it boasted with status of a prestigious export label.

And now, let me get to the conclusion of my presentation.

Now that we have heard about the fate of the gramophone company in Hungary producing Czech recordings, and Czech companies producing Hungarian recordings, we find that any collaboration between Hungary and the Czech lands in the field of sound recordings was a rather sporadic and non-systematic one. And aside from recordings made by a few famous Hungarian composers of symphonic music, probably the only popular music recording, made by a Hungarian composer, and placed on the Czech labels of *Esta* and *Ultraphon*, was



the song *Gloomy Sunday*: on the Esta label it was recorded in the Slovak language, and on the Ultraphon label in Czech language, moreover as late as in 1942.



At the very close, let me conclude my presentation with a short music sample. You will hear the Harry Harden's orchestra, and Karoly Vajda will sing another song by the author of „Gloomy Sunday“. Its English title is „Ups and Downs“. This song was recorded in Prague in 1934.



Ups and downs HH 1398.wav

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.