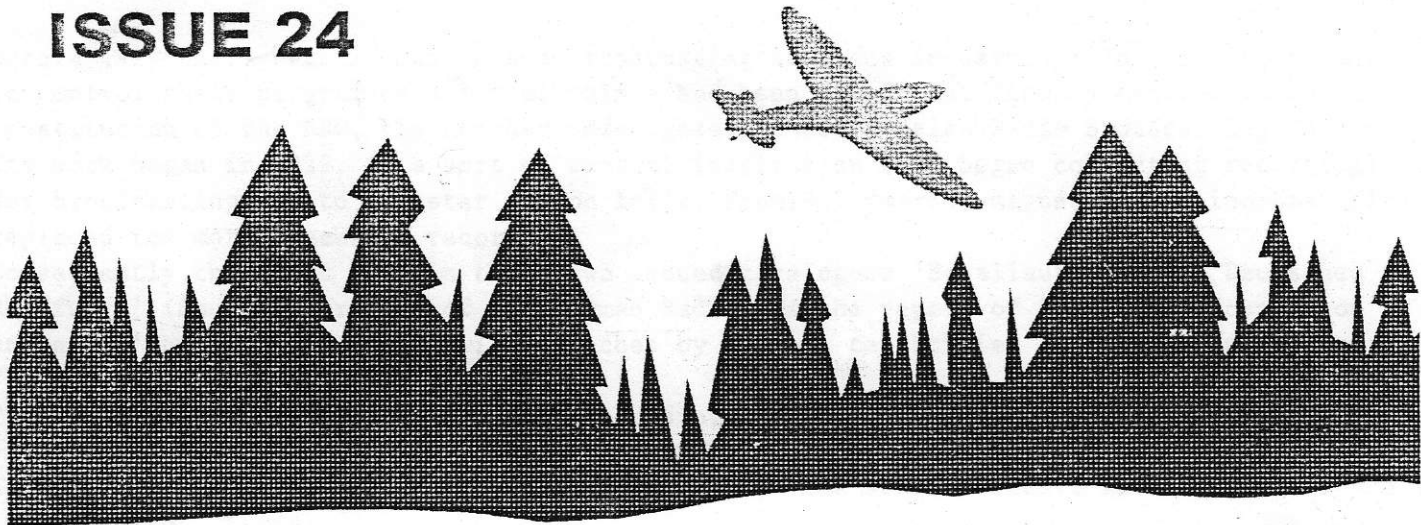
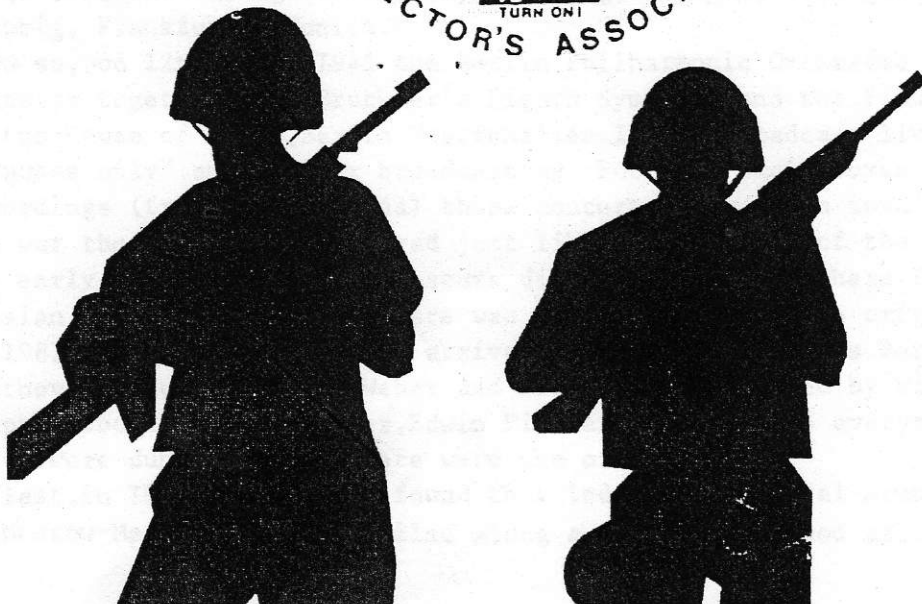


TUNE INTO YESTERDAY

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Reichssender Berlin War Reports 15th April 1945



Stories from
the archives
by
Bernard Wichert

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Before 1929 there were 27 main & sub-broadcasting stations in Germany. To co-ordinate and to control their programmes a lot of things had been tried that finally centred in the constitution of the RRG, the Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft (Reich Radio Broadcasting Co). Its work began in 1929. As a sort of central institution they began collecting recordings for broadcasting and to register them on foils. From 1943 onwards, magnetic tape increasingly replaced the more breakable records.

Consequently, the first item in their two issued catalogues 'Schallaufnahmen des Deutschen Rundfunks' (Sound Recordings of the German Radio) is the report of laying the foundation stone of 'The House of Radio' with speeches by various celebrities and Beethovens Overture "Die Weihe des Hauses" op.124.

These catalogues list, in Volume I, the recordings of 1929-1936 and in Volume 2 those of 1936 - July 1939. There has never been a third volume, probably because of the war and the different tasks that members were then forced to do (eg. join the armed forces). Both catalogues are now collectors items.

The contents of the catalogues are divided into: politics, lectures & speeches, entertainment, series & reports, public events, radio plays, poetry, music - all in all about 2000 pages. The items have numbers giving a) the serial number, b) the matrix numbers (both had to be used for requests that different radio stations in Germany could send in). The layout was as follows: Forst column: the contents - naming occasion, place, speakers. The next column shows the exact duration of each recording (eg. speech, applause, music piece, even pauses are indicated). The day and hour of the recording is listed and occasionally the original recording was made by a local station. In that case the matrices were deposited there and reference was given in the catalogue.

The recordings we still have of the years 1933-1945 show very little of what the population was thinking. No interviews or discussions exist, there is no discussion of everyday life, just Party activities. Some documents exist in the DRA (see below) that were recorded by the Nazi Party engineers, NOT the RRG. To name a few: 'top secret' speeches by Hitler and Himmler; Hitler's & Goebbels's instructions on how to prepare a mass meeting, how to direct the press; Hitler's thoughts on 'his' people in the famous Ordensburg, Vogelsang and Sonthofen speeches before Nazi leaders; Himmler's speech in Posnan on the work and tasks of the SS.

With the war going on, the recordings did not always go to the Berlin archives but to the Reich stations throughout Germany: Hamburg, Cologne, Stuttgart, Konigsberg, Breslau, Leipzig, Frankfurt & Munich.

Even so, on 12th April 1945 the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra played Beethoven's Violin Concerto together with Bruckner's Eighth Symphony and the Finale of Wagner's Gotterdammerung at the House of Radio, Berlin Masurenallee. It was broadcast live and recorded "for archive purposes only" and not for broadcasting. Put into small boxes as were all other archive recordings (from 1942 onwards) these concerts grew to an invaluable collection. Soon after the war these boxes disappeared just like all the rest of the recorded material. Then in the early 1970's music connoisseurs discovered some of these Furtwangler concerts on Russian "Melodia" LP's. Yet there was still no sign of the original tapes till suddenly in 1987- 22 tapes from Moscow arrived at the Sender Freies Berlin station with works of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Weber and Bruckner interpreted by Walter Giesecking, Peter Anders, Knappertsbusch, Strauss, Heger, Edwin Fischer and Rohn. To everyones disappointment the tapes were dubbings. So, where were the originals?

At last, in 1989 a trace was found that led to the Central Archives of the Russian Radio in Moscow-Medwedkovo. There, filed along a large wall, stood about 1000 smaller and 500

larger boxes with German inscriptions declaring them as recordings of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra 1942 - 1945: symphonies, lieder and operas. They said that they had been discovered in the bombed Reichssender Berlin building and "just by chance" deposited with the State Radio of the Soviet Union.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the changing of the situation in Europe it happened that on 14th December 1990 Gostel Radio agreed to send 1462 music tapes to SFB as a sort of thanks for the German help in the Winter of 1989.

Now we can hear the old organ of the Alte Philharmonie as well as the first steps in stereo (Bruckner's Eighth Symphony with the Preussische Staatskapelle conducted by von Karajan with the 4th Movement only in stereo) and, somewhere in the background the cannon's roar. At the end of the war with people and soldiers looting what they could get, most foils, wax matrices and records disappeared, if they had not already been destroyed by bombs. By the end of the 1970's only about 260 speech recordings of the period up to 1936 had been discovered to have survived the war. Of the period January - June 1939, only 18 of 146 political items as indicated in the RRG catalogue still exist. If we think of the enormous number of recordings made throughout Europe by various reporters, propaganda companies and local stations etc we can imagine what a loss that is for collectors and sound archivists, not to mention the recordings of the Wehrmacht made when monitoring every foreign radio station.

The successor to the RRG is the DRA (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv) in Frankfurt am Main which is the holder of all the rest of the recordings. Though in most cases they do not have the original discs or matrices they do have dubbings of a now growing number of recordings related to German history - thanks to international archives from all over Europe and to private collectors.

The DRA has a special listing of recordings of sessions of the notorious Volksgerichtshof (People's Court) in Berlin and its 'trials' for judging the people involved in the plot against Hitler on 20th July 1944. These tape recordings were found in the 1950's by a farmer near Tegernsee which is a town near Rottbach-Egern - the so-called 'Wallberg Documents'. As the story goes, a number of cars of the Reich Propaganda Control of the Nazi Party were attacked by planes and tumbled down a slope. These cars were carrying tapes of sound recordings, which rolled out of the cars and lay forgotten under rotting leaves. Although the cars were towed away by the Americans, the tapes remained unnoticed. At first the farmer tried to clean and dry them himself, but without success. Later they were professionally handled and became part of the DRA archive. Most of the tapes were from 8th August 1944; Allied troops had already discovered the transcripts in 1945.

The DRA has issued some catalogues (as Arndt Buck has researched) as a sort of reference for radio stations that want to use historical recordings, but they had already become obsolete by the time they were printed. There is also a music department which has never issued anything in printed form.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the former GDR Radio/TV was disbanded in 1990 and an enormous amount of material was discovered in an old Wehrmacht bunker in Berlin-Karlshorst. Forty thousand 78rpm shellac discs were found along with 15000 open reels, mostly opera and theatre productions but also speeches. It is now the work of the DRA in Berlin to try and identify and catalogue these items neglected by the old GDR regime. (Apart from those pre-1945 recordings, about 100,000 video recordings were also found covering the nearly 40-year history of East Germany).

One year earlier - 1988 - an incredible archive was discovered in the former Czechoslovakia. Thousands of negative matrices containing German radio broadcasts, especially plays, were found in a small village near Prague. They had been part of the archive of the German station in Bohemia between 1939-1945. The Czechs had not been able to use the material

because they lacked the proper equipment - which the DRA had! In the meantime some of the plays have been dubbed and gave rise to hot debate among German experts. The broadcast 'Rebellion in der Goldstadt' (Rebellion in the City of Gold) written by the poet Gunther Eich (1907-1972) and produced in May 1940 made people think about Eich's involvement in Nazi ideas as the play glorifies anti-English moods: democracy, equality, freedom are used by England (so the play goes) to cover her interests in power and industrial exploitation. I don't want to get into detail but it is quite fascinating to see what can happen when old recordings come to light.

(ORCA NOTE: thanks Bernard for that excellent article. Hopefully in the future we shall be able to reprint some more of your well-researched pieces.)

Radio Times

The violent crown

In Jubilee year Richard Burton narrates
Vivat Rex, a 26-part chronicle of
 200 years of English history, Sunday Radio 4.
 Back feature: Burton's 30 years of broadcasting;
 and a turbulent age of kings



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