The emergence of a national record industry in the Baltic region

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The record industry was created by a small number of multinational companies

- The Gramophone Company, founded in the United Kingdom 1898, operated on a global scale. Their first recordings in the Baltic region were made between 1901 and 1904
- Gramophone established factories in Hannover, Hayes, Riga,
 Vienna, Milan, Barcelona and Calcutta. Between 1898 and
 1925, the company made about 100,000 recordings
- Gramophone was followed by a small number of German and French companies (Beka, Odeon, Favorite, Pathé) with a similar global startegy
- Even today, most of the records sold in the world are produced by the four largest multinational companies

A typical recording session at Hotel Kämp, Helsinki, October 1909

from left: Gramophone's agent Otto Brandt, Oskar Merikanto, Eino Rautavaara, Gramophone Co engineer E. J. Pearse, unknown. The records were pressed in Hanover or Riga



Local independent companies emerged slowly

- Record production required a large investment in technology and know-how
- The multinationals were willing to produce local music even for small markets, to promote the sale of gramophones
- They were also prepared to cooperate with local dealers, pressing records on custom labels for local trade (below, Lindström & Gramophone pressings for Argentina and Denmark))





New record factories emerge, as demand for records grows

- Independent record factories were eventually opened in many larger countries. There were record factories in Budapest, Neaples, Constantinople and Warsaw in the 1910s
- The first record factory in Sweden was opened in Saltsjöbaden by the singer-entrepreneur Ernst Rolf in 1919. It was unsuccesful and soon closed down.
- There were no record factories in Denmark, Finland or Norway until the mid-1930s. All records were pressed in Germany or UK

The first "independent" in the Baltic area: the Syrena company was founded by the Feigenbaum family in Warsaw in 1908, to supply the expanding Russian market. It lasted until World War Two. Syrena also made a small number of Finnish recordings c. 1930







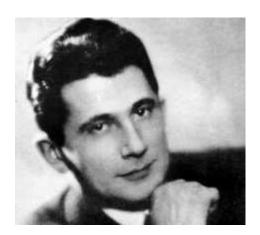
The multinationals were still dominant in the 1920s. After the economic depression of 1929-33, all European countries adopted protectionist economic policies

 The first company in Sweden to take advantage of the new situation was Sonora, founded in November 1932. Thanks to local pressing and new marketing methods, it could offer lower prices and soon became a market leader. The best-selling Sonora discs sold over 100,000 copies



Bellaccord, a Latvian multinational?

 The Bellaccord Electro company was started in 1931 by Helmars Rudzitis. It began record production in Riga in similar circumstances as Sonora in Sweden



 Helmars Rudzitis (b. Riga 1903 – d. New York 2001) was the founder of the publishing house Gramatu Draugs. Continued as publisher after exile to the USA

A short history of Bellaccord

- Founded 1931, published records on Bellaccord Electro label
- Large Latvian repertoire, mostly popular music
- Finnish and Estonian repertoire, also Lithuanian?
- Also issued records pressed from German matrices
- Nationalized in 1940/41, continues under first Soviet occupation? No activity 1941/45?
- The nationalized label was revived in 1945, becomes Riga branch of Melodiya in 1961 (Rigas skanuplasu fabrika). Some metal masters from 30s survive?
- A discography and history of Bellaccord is needed !!!

The Bellaccord label



Bellaccord in Estonia

 According to Heino Pedusaar, Bellaccord was the only company making Estonian recordings in 1933-4, when the multinationals had cut down their operations in many regions



Bellaccord and the emigre market

 The company also produced recordings for the Russian emigre market; their most prominent artist was the singer Pjotr

Lestchenko



Bellaccord in Finland



Rudzitis and Saarikko

- Finnish businessman N. E. (Niilo) Saarikko (1898-1979) represented several smaller European record companies in Finland. He cooperated with Artiphon, Syrena, and Edison Bell, and issued records on his own labels Columbus and Fenno. They were pressed in Germany (Artiphon) and Poland (Syrena)
- In 1933-34, Saarikko organised recording sessions with Rudzitis in Riga, singing himself with a Latvian band. We shall hear him singing the fox trot "Teräslintu"
- Sessions in 1934 with Matti Jurva and 1935 with Arvi Hänninen
- Bellaccord also issues several "pseudo-Finnish" records with an anonymous Latvian dance band and a "pirated" disc from Columbia
- Total of 29 Finnish Bellaccord records issued (58 sides)
- Records issued in the Bellaccord S 1001 series

Other Nordic independents

- As record sales started to grow again in the late 1930s, independent record companies emerged in most European countries. Esta in Czechoslovakia, Patria in Hungary, Tono in Denmark...
- In Finland, the Sointu label was started in 1938. It cooperated with Sonora and even copied their label design



After the war

- After WW2, the global record industry was reorganised. Protectionist policies continued, local manufacturing was favoured.
- The multinationals solved the problem by establishing local branches or agencies in all countries. Only the metal masters were imported, pressing was local
- The existence of local studios and pressing plants also made possible the development of independent local companies such as Metronome, Cupol and Karusell in Sweden, Triola and Scandia in Finland, etc
- In Eastern Europe, the record industry was nationalised and eventually consolidated into national monopolies such as Polskie Nagranie and Melodiya. Occasionally pre-war archives have survived.

Conclusions

- The emergence of independent local record companies was a phenomenon typical of the 1930s. Their history is still little known
- The local companies were obviously quicker to adapt to the changed situation that the multinationals, which had grown too large and inflexible
- How did the practices of the new independent companies differ from the old multinationals, which had dominated the market?
- How much did they cooperate with each other?
- Did their repertoire differ from the multinationals, or did they just produce similar recordings cheaper?
- Thank you for your interest. Comments to pekka.gronow@artiemusic.com