

# The emergence of a national record industry in the Baltic region

Pekka Gronow

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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 strategy
- 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, Naples, 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 unsuccessful 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 than 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](mailto:pekka.gronow@artiemusic.com)