



# BELLACCORD – BELOVED PREWAR LATVIAN RECORD COMPANY

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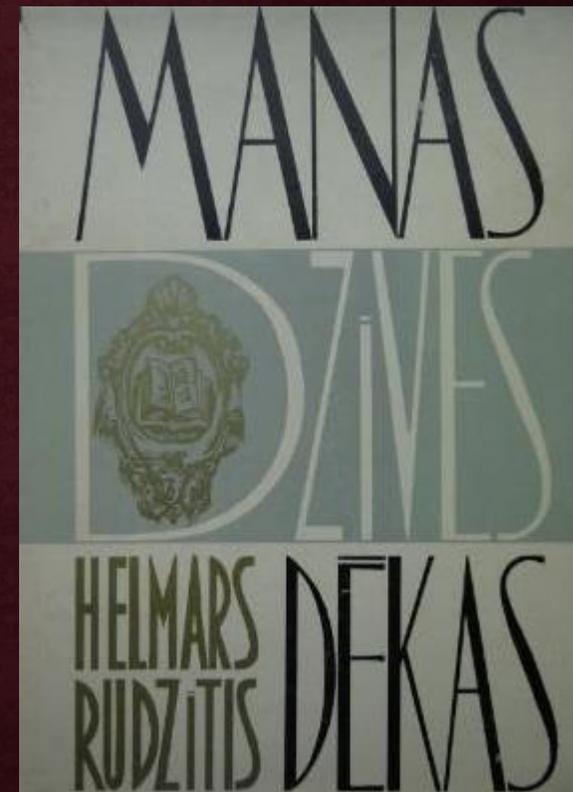
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# THE FOUNDER

**Bellaccord Electro**, generally known as **Bellaccord**, is a phonograph record label founded in Latvia in 1931 by **Helmars Rudzītis** (1903-2001) – innovative, enthusiastic Latvian businessman.



Being an adventurer in the best sense of the word, his life was filled with fresh ideas and projects which he launched in the period of 1930s – Latvian «peace» time. He first became famous in Latvia's cultural environment with his book publishing company known as «Grāmatu draugs» (Book friend). In a very short time his inexpensive books became very popular throughout Latvia, enabling the ordinary reader to get acquainted with local fiction masterpieces, as well as the translations of the world's classics. At the age of 28, he started a new adventure and created the very first Latvian record company.



The dramatic and happy moments of his life he collected in his memoirs «My life's adventures». From this work we can acquire many details about the creation of Bellaccord.

# THE BEGINNING



In 1902 the first «Gramophone» branch was founded in Russia and the first gramophone factory, called «Пишущий Амур» (Writing Cupid) was built in Riga. So we can consider the year 1902 as the beginning of phonograph record manufacturing in Latvia. During the World War I the production was interrupted for several years.



After the World War I, when Latvia became independent country, its industry rapidly revived. A good example was Latvia's largest electronics factory, the well-known VEF (based in Riga) – it manufactured modern radios, photo cameras and even aeroplanes.

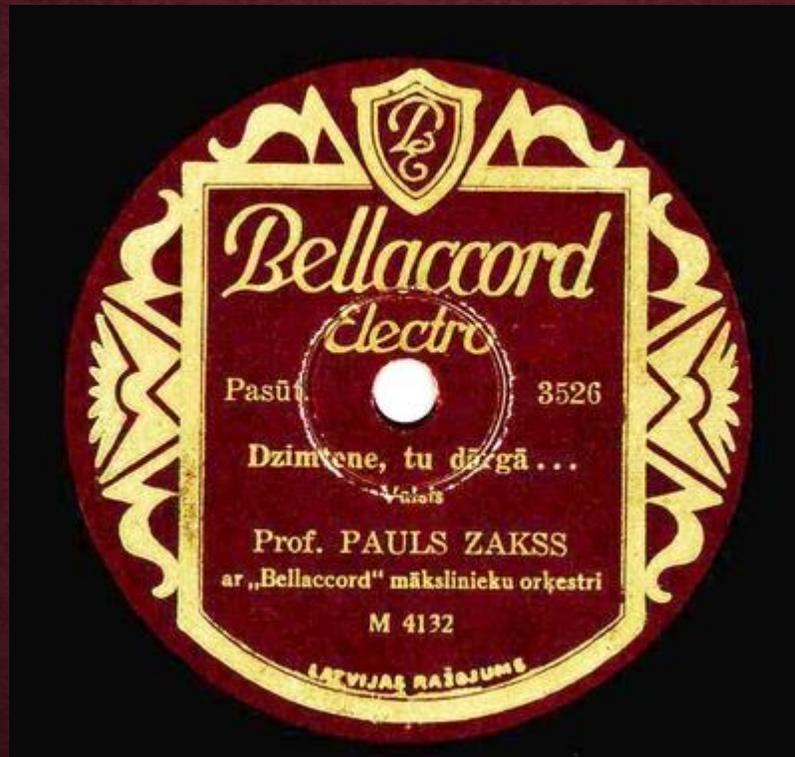
However, up to the beginning of 1930s Latvian musicians had no opportunity to record their music in Latvia.



They travelled to Berlin and recorded in «Odeon», «Parlophon» and other studios, as well as in «His Master's Voice» studio in London. After record was made and reproduced, it was exported to Latvia. At that time a record would cost 4-5 Lats each, and some exclusive symphonic music records would cost 20 Lats and more (surcharge included customs and retail charges). However, expensive foreign phonograph records did not meet the needs of the local people.

Among Rudzītis friends were popular Latvian artists who encouraged him to start a new record manufacturing business. And soon he himself became obsessed with this idea, however, as a book publisher, Rudzītis had no idea how to realize such a project. Being a communicative person, he soon met some business partners and, most importantly, advisors and specialists in sound recording field. Thanks to his perseverance, sense of purpose and belief in success, Latvians could soon listen to their beloved music performers recorded on shellac discs at an affordable price (~2.50 Lats), with a proud «Made in Latvia» sign on it.

# BIRTH OF BELLACCORD



Great deal of effort was invested in good appearance and sound quality of records. «...I named the manufactory «Bellaccord Electro» because the sound of the name was appropriate. The first word «Bellacord» is supposed to mean that records produced in this fabric will be with a really good sound, the second – «Electro» – means that the sounds are picked up electrically not acoustically like before...», quoting H.Rudzītis from his memoirs «My life's adventures» .



An expert of old records noted: «The basic label format is practically identical to an earlier Brunswick label, the florid curves being replaced here by the angular lines of Art Deco. The sunrise motif at the sides is a popular Art Deco image, symbolizing the dawning of a new age. The use of the word 'Electro' likely refers to the electrical recording process, which was a big sales feature in the late 1920s and early 1930s.» (citation from [www.tedstaunton.com](http://www.tedstaunton.com))

# DREAMS AND REALITY

**Gesangs- und Instrumental-Soli**

**Sopran**  
Grete Stückgold  
Lotte Schöne  
Anni Christensen  
Gertrud Bindernagel  
Charlotte Viereck-Kimpel  
Lola Artôt de Padilla

**Alt**  
Rosette Anday  
Helene Jung  
Hedwig Fichtmüller

**Tenor**  
Alfred Picaver  
Tino Pattiera  
Josef Kalenberg  
Byrre Taka  
Fritz Krauß  
Costa Milona

**Bariton**  
George Baklanoff  
Hans Bahling  
Ivan Iwanzoff  
Carl Renner

**Baß**  
Emanuel List  
Leo Schützendorf  
Carl Braun  
Prof. Albert Fischer

**Violine**  
Franz von Vessey  
Max Rostal  
Prof. Daniel Karpilowski  
Georges Boulanger  
Prof. Rudolf Deman

**Cello**  
Prof. Arnold Földesy  
Prof. Heinrich Grünfeld  
Gregor Ptigorsky

**Klavier**  
Celeste Chop-Groenevelt  
Prof. Emil von Sauer  
Fugues d'Albert  
Prof. Conrad Ansoerge

**VOX**  
die Deutsche  
**MUSIKPLATTE**  
wird unter Verwendung auserlesenster Rohstoffe hergestellt. Sorgfältige Auswahl und Zusammenstellung der Rohstoffe sowie dauernde Prüfung der Fabrikationsvorgänge verbürgen beste Ausführung.

*Verlangen Sie kostenlose Zusendung der monatlich erscheinenden Listen über Neuerscheinungen.*

**VOX**  
**SCHALLPLATTEN-UND SPRECHMASCHINEN A.G.**  
BERLIN W 35

**Orchestermusik und Instrumental-Quartette**

**Symphonien, Ouvertüren, Konzert-Stücke**  
Generalmusikdirektor  
Erich Kleiber  
Generalmusikdirektor  
Dr. Ernst Kunwäld  
Künstler-Orchester  
Tino Valeria  
Orchester Jenő Fesca  
Orchester  
Georges Boulanger

**Märsche**  
Blas-Orchester des  
Obermusikdirektors a. D.  
Adolf Becker  
VOX-Orchester

**Tänze**  
Bernard Etti  
Gabriel Formiggini  
Künstler-Jazz-Orchester  
Georges Boulanger  
Kapelle Jenő Fesca  
Tango-Kapelle  
Manuel Romeo

**Instrumental-Trios**  
Weißberger-Trio  
Boulanger-Trio  
Gregor von Altmühl-Trio  
Karpilowsky-Trio

**Instrumental-Quartette**  
Guarnacci-Quartett  
Böhmisches Streichquartett  
Klingler-Quartett  
Deman-Quartett

**Gesangs-Chöre**  
Berliner Liedertafel  
Männerchor  
Fichte-Georgina  
Russischer Kavaliers-Chor  
mit Domras-Kapelle  
Wassil Kijon

Quoting H.Rudzītis: «Around 1930s production of phonograph records in Europe was in hands of a few concerns. The production was being dictated by big companies, small businesses had no saying in the industry. A small German factory «Vox» also had to be closed – after many years of fighting for rights. The whole set of factory’s machinery was for sale... As I was ‘intoxicated with record disease’, I bought the record reproduction machinery ... however I wanted to own the newest recording equipment. That’s when problems occurred. Many parts of equipment were patented and they belonged to the concerns. (cont. next page)

Georg Neumann

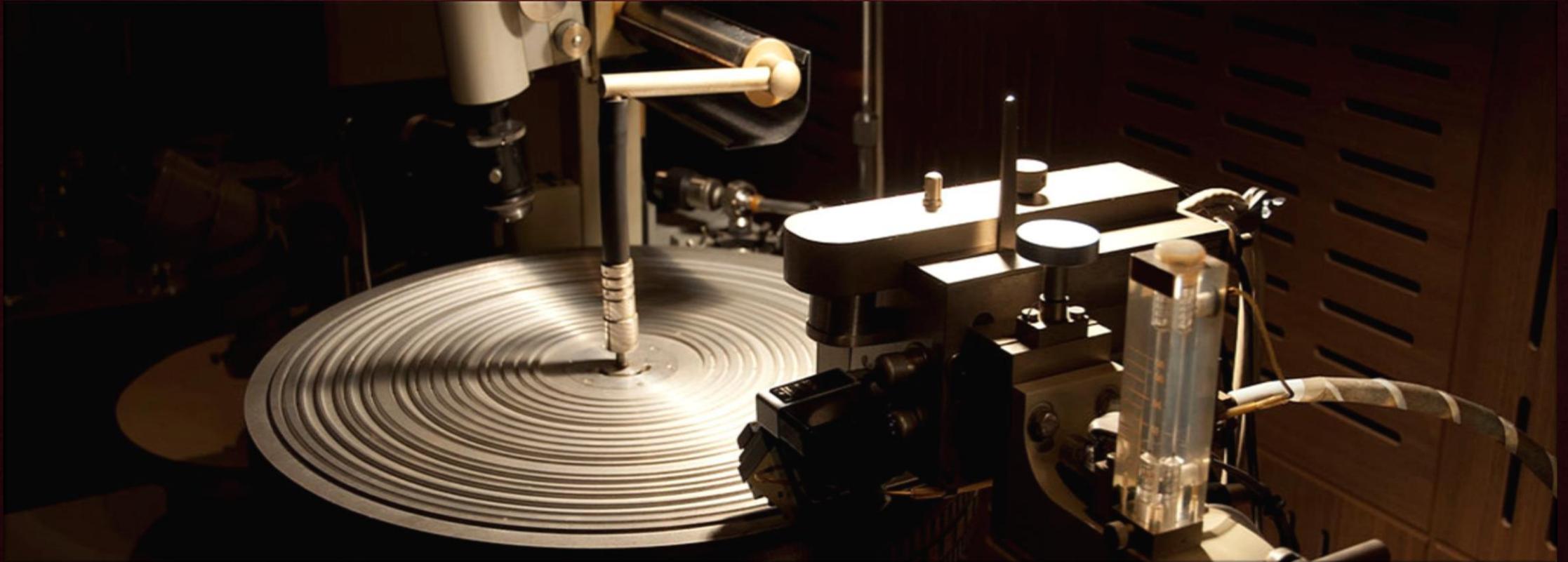


...The modern equipment at that time was produced by Neuman's firm in Berlin. I established contact with the owner and persuaded him to make equipment without firm's label, as I needed good recording machinery, not his firm's name on it».

Georg Neumann, German engineer, invented a new kind of microphone known as a condenser microphone. Not quite what we would call a studio microphone these days, but they were used by German radio stations for the first time in 1923. The CMV 3 was the first ever mass produced condenser microphone, far superior to the previous microphones, and it gained recognition under the nickname of the 'Neumann Bottle'. Between 1928 and the end of World War II (WW2) the 'Bottle's' design remained virtually unchanged, during which time it became firmly established as the standard for studio use.

Neumann Bottle





By 1928 Neumann had spread his attention to other aspects of studio engineering, such as record making. The machine for cutting records became the basis for Georg Neumann & Co's secondary line of products.

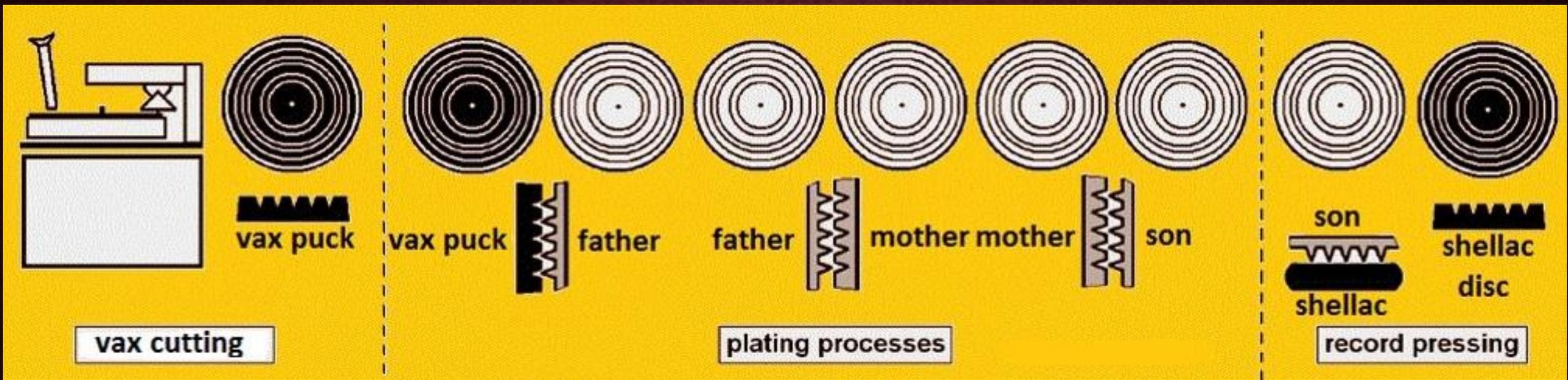
# BACK TO LATVIA



Quoting Rudzītis... «Hectic work began. Berlin factory was dismantled and all equipment was transported to Riga, where it was assembled again in Kalnciema Street 40. My factory was able to produce everything you need for shellac records. The largest and heaviest machines were for preparing the shellac mass. Then there was a wide range of pressing, galvanizing gear, steam boiler, grinding equipment, etc. And when all the machines were in place, the factory chimney really started to reek... (cont. next page)

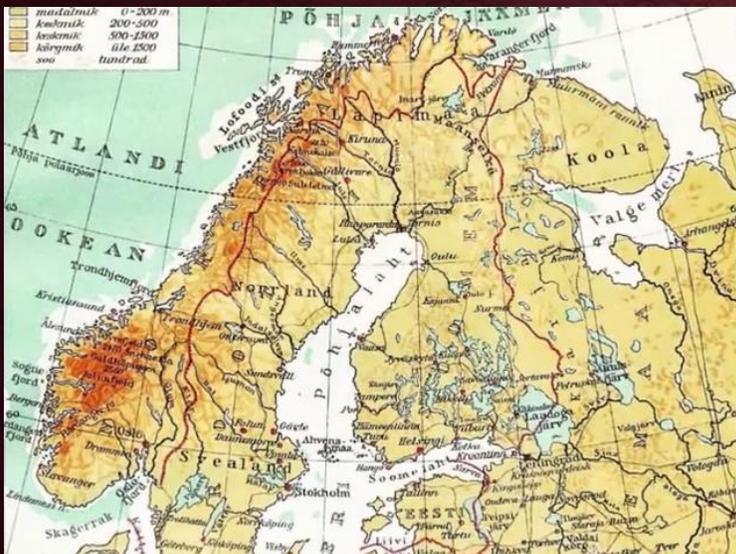


In addition to room for record manufacturing, I needed to acquire a recording studio with good acoustics, like in Radio ... As the Latvian Radio at that time didn't have such kind of sound devices like I had, we made a deal - that I will use the Radio studio room for my music recordings, but the Radio will be able to use my equipment for their recordings.»



Rudzītis described the entire manufacturing process like this: «At first, recordings were cut in a thick wax puck. Then this puck was galvanized, where it was stacked with a layer of copper, which was called the "father". From the plated "father" it would be possible to print the discs, but if the "father" became defective, the record would be gone. Therefore, the "father" once again went back to galvanizing, where new metal layer was stacked. It was the "mother". From the "mother" discs could not be pressed, because it had the opposite imprint. Therefore, the "mother" went back to the acid bath to stack «the son". Plated "son" was mounted on a thicker copper disc, then it went to press and shellac discs were produced. If you broke the son, the mother was able to produce a new son, and if you broke the mother - the father was able to produce a new mother. Father, as the patriarch of the family, usually rested in archive until there was a need for it, the mother also usually enjoyed a long rest. But sons took the heaviest work, preparing discs from hot black mass.»

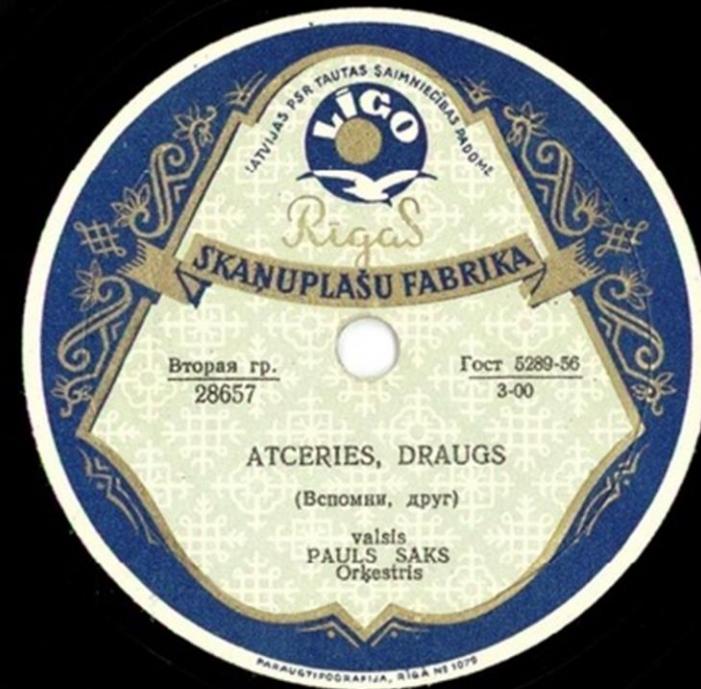
# SUCCESS AND MILESTONES



With the devices being installed and 17 workers in the early years of its existence, the factory produced 600 records per day. The company's annual turnover was about 80 000 Lats, and in 1934 additional revenue was obtained from production of Christmas tree decorations. The company "Bellaccord Electro" owned a shop in Riga, and at that time it could be proud of the fairly wide range of products exported to Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Sweden and even China.

Rudzītis wrote: «If Latvians had a long road to Berlin or London, for Estonians it was even further. So they chose the closest way and soon Estonian songs were played in Riga Radio studio as well. After a while Estonian phonograph market was in the hands of the Bellaccord. There was no need to go overseas, all could be arranged right here, with neighbours. Finns took example from Estonians and looked for connections with us».

Before WW2 Bellaccord records represented Latvia in two international exhibitions: in 1934 such exhibition was held in Stockholm, the second exhibition was in Brussels.



Everything Rudzītis created took almost 14 years, however it took less than a year to start to ruin it. In 1940 Helmar Rudzītis property was nationalized and the factory Bellaccord-Electro came under the patronage of the Latvian SSR Radio. During WW2 Bellaccord's activity was restored, but its management fell into the hands of the Germans. The original label was saved, but it appeared as 'Sonderklasse' – Special class. Despite the ever-ongoing war, in 1943 Bellaccord's production did not diminish, on the contrary – the demand was rising and this year's production reached around 180-200'000 records. In 1944, when Soviets came back, the factory obtained 'less bourgeois' name «Rīgas skaņuplašu fabrika» (Riga phonograph factory). Due to historical circumstances Helmar and his family moved to the USA in 1949.

# REPERTOIRE

Browsing through the catalogues of the Bellacord, one can discover interesting facts about audience taste and popular artists of the 1930s in Latvia. About 70% of the recordings represent popular, dance and jazz music. At that time it was common to find recordings of a famous National Opera soloist performing popular songs. Serious music was in little demand, but another explanation for this could be the limited recording space on a shellac disc. One side of the 25cm disc can capture about 3 minutes of recorded sound.



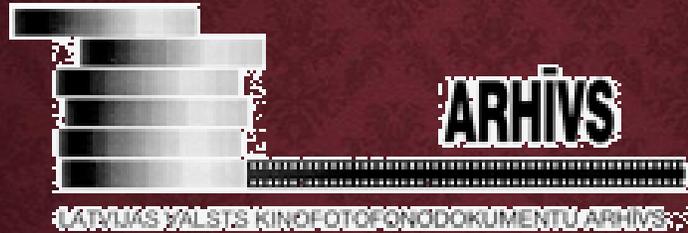


As an example, in the 1932 catalogue of Bellaccord, are these headings: Modern hits, Modern schlagers, Instrumental music hits, Waltzes, Salon music, Marches and Hymns, Folk music, Gypsy music, Christmas music, Līgo festival music, Jewish music. Additionally, in the 1937 catalogue one can find: the National anthem, Choir music, Spiritual music, Celebration music, Best Latvian singers, Dance music, Hawayan music, Opera and operetta, Concert music, Symphonic orchestra, Instrumental soloists, Old dances, Humoristic sketches, as well as recordings in foreign languages - Russian, German, English, Jewish.

Besides originally recorded music, Bellaccord also offered records of internationally well-known singers, bands and orchestras.

After regaining independence in 1990s, some entrepreneurs have gathered Bellaccord records and re-issued them on CDs. It's a good starting point for preserving the contribution of Rudzītis.

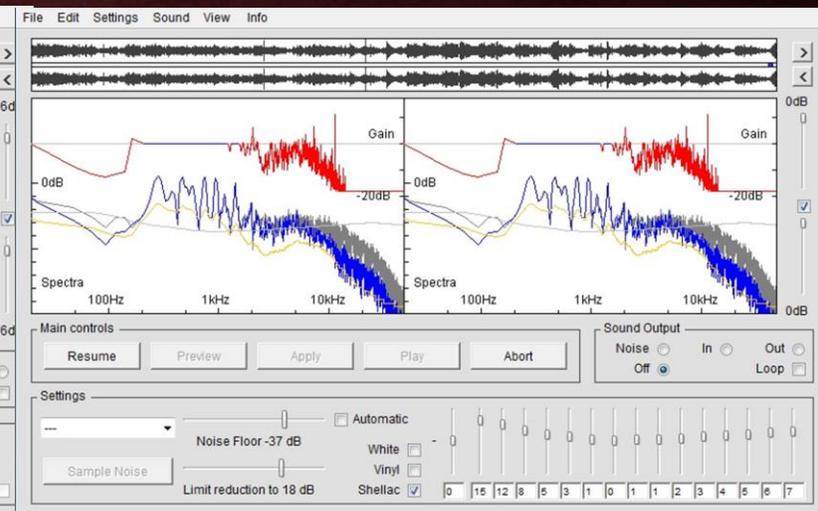
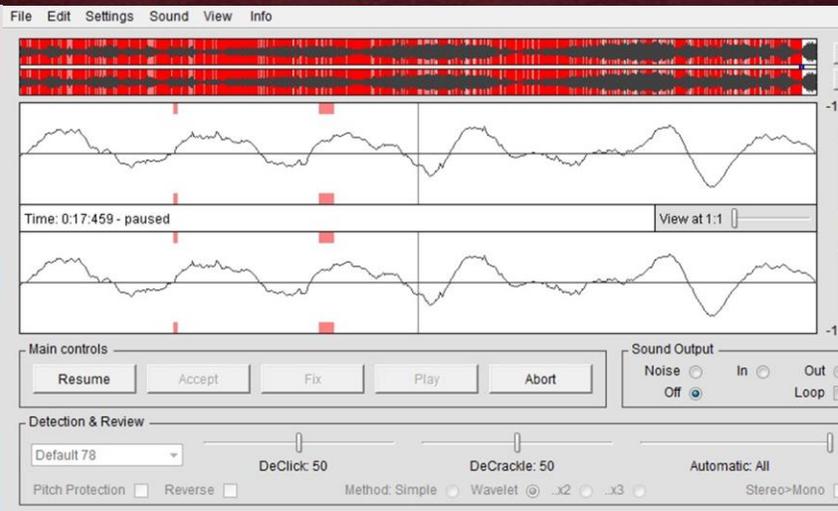
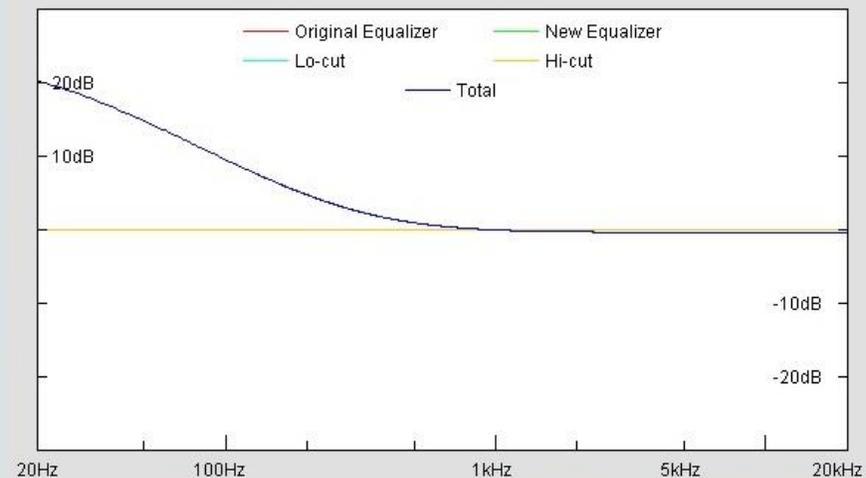
# PRESERVATION



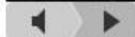
An important issue is preservation of this heritage. Fortunately, there are private collectors who have been very enthusiastic about collecting all the shellac discs related to Latvia. Larger or smaller collections of «Bellacord» discs can also be found at the state institutions such as the National Archives of Latvia, National Library of Latvia, Literature and Music museum. Cooperation between private collectors and state institutions is essential for ensuring continued disc preservation, as well as digitisation and access. In 2014 the National Library of Latvia moved to its new building with appropriate storage for audiovisual materials, and continues to digitise shellac discs, including Bellacord, of course.

A little about capturing device used for disc reading. We have two alternatives: Laser turntable or classic turntable. After some experimentation we came to the conclusion that deeper and more saturated sound is obtained from the classic turntable which is equipped with appropriate needle, cartridge and phono amplifier. Laser turntable's advantage is reading the material without touching, however, it has been established that this device likes records which are in good condition, but we have few of those.





The digitising process starts with disc surface exploration. There haven't been any Mint condition records among the Bellacord discs. The most common condition is Fair. About 10% of the discs are in Good condition, and, unfortunately, frequently they are in Poor condition. Light mechanical cleaning, sometimes with fluid, slightly improves the situation. Then the audio signal is captured into the audio editing software (in 96khz; 24bit resolution), saved as an archival file, then converted to an appropriate equalization curve, click repair and noise reduction is applied, and a 'clean' file is made. MP3 copy is also made for easy distribution via the Internet.



<b>Nosaukums</b>	Ak, nāc! : romance
<b>Līdzradītājs</b>	Feldmanis, E..
<b>Līdzradītājs</b>	Keizers, T.
<b>Līdzradītāja loma</b>	dziedātājs
<b>Līdzradītāja loma</b>	diriģents
<b>Resursa tips</b>	Skaņu ieraksts
<b>Apjoms</b>	1 skpl. : analogs, 78 apgr/min, mono ; 25 cm
<b>Priekšmets</b>	Romances (mūzika)
<b>Publicēšanas datums</b>	[19--]
<b>Izdevējs</b>	[Latvija] : Bellaccord Electro
<b>Organizācija, kurā atrodas oriģināls</b>	Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka
<b>Origināla novietojuma kods</b>	Fsh/61
<b>Identifikators</b>	3189
<b>Autortiesības</b>	Nav aizsargāts ar autortiesībām
<b>Piešķuves tiesības</b>	Pieejams tīmeklī



Next, the disc label is scanned and saved as image files, and these together with the sound files are stored on a server. After further processing these records can be accessed (some of them worldwide) at the National Library of Latvia site – [audio.lndb.lv](http://audio.lndb.lv).

## References:

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[https://www.neumann.com/?lang=en&id=about\\_us\\_history\\_part\\_1](https://www.neumann.com/?lang=en&id=about_us_history_part_1)