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A technology and its vicissitudes: playing the gramophone in Sweden 1903-1945.¹ **Ulrik Volgsten**

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It has almost become a commonplace in the literature to describe the entry of the phonograph into Western music history as taking place in the parlour, or (depending on the decade of focus) the living room. "Americans", we are told, "increasingly welcomed the phonograph into their parlors" (Katz 2010, 62). People were "[a]t home with the phonograph" (Gelatt 1977, 69) already at the turn of the 20th century, since there was "[a] phonograph in every home" (Millard 1995, 37). With classical musicians such as Caruso, Toscanini, and Heifetz on record, one can even speak of a "[d]omestication of the concert hall" (Symes 2004, 60). But although the writers quoted are much more nuanced than the brief phrases and headlines may indicate, one can nevertheless question the overall picture. Was there a phonograph (or gramophone; the terms are interchangeable in many contexts) in every home, even in the affluent parlours of the upper strata of society? And when there was, how common was the classical canon in comparison to popular song and dance music?

A reason for doubt is the strong focus on, and rather limited sources in, commercial advertising of much recent research; the new phonograph and record industry worked hard to establish the new technology as a "natural" part of the prestigious milieu of the cultural elite, whereby an idealised picture of phonogram listening in the parlour was part and parcel of the marketing strategy (Frith 1987/2007; Gauß 2009, 148ff.; Siefert 1995). Thus what the commercials picture cannot be taken at face value. A second reason is the different research once carried out *in praesentia*. At the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, Stuart Chapin and colleagues researched the "socio-economic status" of middle class homes in the U.S.A. Inquiring "living room equipment" as an indicator of status, it is telling that whereas a piano at home acquired the high score of 5 points, a gramophone only scored 2 points, records of classical music score 0,1 each, whereas a jazz record only scored 0, 01. In comparison, an electrical sewing machine scored 3 points on Chapin's scale, and books 0,2 each (Chapin 1932, 581ff.).

Although Chapin's research hardly meets the standards of today's social sciences, if it tells us anything at all it is that "phonographs" (listed by Chapin under "mechanical instruments") and "phonograph records" seems to have had a rather mediocre social status in the U.S.A. A gramophone was not the kind of equipment you boasted or showed off with to your friends and neighbours.

To balance what can thus be described as a lop-sided picture, this inquiry deals with the role of what I choose to call *phonography*, i.e. the technology and the use of phonographs/gramophones (what Gauß calls "phonoobjekte", Gauß op cit. 14) from a different perspective. Rather than looking at the economically prosperous east coast of the USA (which much previous research has done), the focus is on Sweden, a country with one of the lowest standards of living in Europe during the first decades of the 20th century (a condition which according to *Life Magazine* changed to its obverse in less than four decades).² The question asked is how phonography turned from being a

¹ Research financed by VR

² According to *Life Magazine* (June 1938), Sweden had "the highest standard of living in the world".

scientific invention into becoming an everyday media technology, and how it thereby influenced culture and everyday musical communication (cf. Gauß op cit. 15ff.). The inquiry takes its starting point in the year 1903, when the phonograph was already well established and the gramophone made its first entry in the country. It then continues through 1945, which marks the end of World War II and a German-dominated economic and cultural era in Sweden, in favour of a radically new Anglo-American ditto that is beyond the scope of a single article.³

Source material consists of newspapers, popular and semi-scholarly journals, together with catalogues of early housing- and home exhibitions, and an ethnographic questionnaire from 1962, with national scope, asking for personal memories of the gramophone at the turn of the century. Commercial advertising is thus supplemented and compared with other kinds of journalistic and semi-scholarly content, from news to short novels, from public policy plans to personal memory accounts. By examining media that addresses the non-specialist and non-connoisseur of recorded music (and as it turns out, even the non-listener), focussing on the domestic life and space of the home, I hope to strike a balance between on the one hand the ordinary and prosaic, and on the other hand the desirable and prestigious – a broad spectrum over which the everyday is likely to be distributed for a large amount of the population.⁴ This perspectival widening also has the advantage of adding a European component (beyond Great Britain and central Europe), which at the same time as it highlights a specific national case (peripheral Sweden), reflects on aspects of the mediatization of music with relevance beyond the merely local.⁵

The findings are sorted according to five loosely knit themes, which are chronologically ordered, although with large temporal overlaps (approximate time frames are headlined within brackets). The first, introduced with a historical backdrop, shows the ambivalence towards the phonograph and the gramophone during the first decade. The second looks for traces of the gramophone in the upper class *salong*, and ends up in the tedious complaints of the daily press. The third takes recording rates and advertisements as indicators of gramophone occurrence in the less cultivated corners of society, and discovers a non-representational aesthetics in favour of dance and diverted music consumption. The fourth theme detects a change in attitude towards the gramophone and its recordings, as electronic technology becomes the norm and influences both performance and listening practices. Through the fifth theme we encounter the ideals behind the modern living room, as they were articulated and depicted from the mid 1920s on. The living room eventually becomes the place for recreation and solitary listening (emulating the acoustic conditions of the record stores' listening rooms). However, simple housing and accommodation statistics shows that, still at the end of the period examined, this living room was but a pipe dream for the

³ In the most comprehensive study to date of the history of the phonograph in Sweden, the final chapter claims to cover the 1890s and the phonograph's move "from market fairs to home entertainment" (Franzén et al. 2008, 84). But although the chapter ends with a section on the gramophone, nothing substantial is said about either the phonograph or the gramophone entering domestic space.

⁴ Announcements for radio-programmes in the daily press are not covered, nor the entry of radio broadcasting (on the latter, see Björnberg 1998).

⁵ In contrast to Pekka Gronow and Ilpo Saunio, who in their seminal book on the international history of the recording industry apologize "for choosing Finland as an example of developments in the smaller European countries" (1998, viii), I regard the peripheral perspective as a potential asset.

majority of the population. To the extent that the gramophone had a fixed place at all at home – as inventory that is, not stashed away in a box in a closet or under a bed – it was played, listened and danced to mostly in company with others.

The concluding discussion suggests that the process uncovered be understood not simply in terms of a mediatization of music – i.e. how the turning of sound recording technique into an everyday media technology influenced culture and everyday musical communication (cf. Krotz 2009, 24) – but also more profoundly as a particular instance of the *musicalization* of culture and everyday life (cf. Pontara & Volgsten 2017).

1) *Early reception: the first decade (1903-1913)*

The phonograph had been introduced in Swedish newspapers already in early 1878 (shortly before it was patented in the U.S.). Later the same year it was exhibited to the public at the Academy of Science in Stockholm. Whereas the phonograph initially triggered scientific interest, by the turn of the century it had become a more or less common attraction at markets and fairs around the country (Franzén et al. 2008, 8ff., Boström 2006). The cylinders on which the sounds were recorded usually contained local or national productions. For instance, on his first acquaintance with the phonograph, the Swedish king Oscar II had recorded himself singing, a cylinder however destroyed upon first hearing (the king, keenly interested in industrial innovations, also recorded his own organ playing on the new *Tonfonograf* invented by the piano manufacturer Carl Wilhelm Nyström in 1891 [anon. 1925, 18]). On the other hand, the opening speech by the king at the Stockholm international industry fair of 1897, was recorded in multiple copies (by the king himself as well as by others) that circulated in the country for many years (Boström 2006, 198). A curious and early example of New World music on cylinder is the local military marching band Kronobergs Regementes Musikcorps performance of the cake-walk *At a Georgia Camp Meeting*, recorded in 1899 (Bruér & Westin 2006, 26).

Twenty years after its invention the phonograph, or *talking machine* as it was widely called, still seemed uncertain what content best to emit – verbal speech or music. As the machine enters into the twentieth century it continues to capture the interest of the press, although the view is highly ambivalent. For instance, in a review of an “Opera-fonograf-konsert” given in November 1900 at the Academy of science in Stockholm, the daily *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD), which since 1897 had adopted an explicit ambition to cover cultural-aesthetic issues (Lundström 2001, 26), reports in sardonic tone, pleading for divine redemption (SvD 001119). However a review in the same paper of a following concert a few weeks later is more soberly treated (the label “concert” signals not only a musical content but also the phonograph’s “serious” ambitions), noting the audience’s enthusiastic applause, while also informing the reader about the Edison Phonograph Company’s commercial aims behind the concert (SvD 001212).

Whereas the recording of sound by the phonograph was sensational news in the late 1870s, the 1903 gramophone première was not. Squeezed between notices on real estate purchases and a newly patented chairbed, the gramophone nevertheless gains a positive judgement as unequalled in reproducing the human voice: “one could almost imagine seeing the vocalist” (SvD 030415). This can be compared with the review (also

in the same paper) of the “grammofon-konsert” in the foyer of the Royal Opera in 1906, arranged by *Grammofonaktiebolaget* (the Gramophone Company):

No matter how the invention may be further “perfected”, it is to be feared that it shall not be able to bestow real artistic enjoyment; the reproduced instruments and the human voices will inevitably sound dead and shrill, since apparently the inscrutable “overtones”, which provide for the distinctive timbre, will not make it onto the record. (SvD 060224)⁶

But there are also positive reviews. A similar event at a less fashionable retailer’s store a year earlier arranged by the Lyrophone company received an unhesitatingly positive review in the journal *Damernas Musikblad* (The Ladies’ Music Magazine):

[A]lthough we have previously not been enthusiastic admirers of such devices, we must admit that our opinion in this matter has completely changed, since the Lyrophone discs we had the opportunity to hear reproduced with an unequally lifelike way with unusual strength and clear tone the songs performed. (DM 1905 issue 16)

Even the phonograph gets an occasional good word in the press. The semi scholarly *Svensk Musiktidning* (Swedish Music Journal), which had reported already in 1900 about the mentioned phonograph concert (SMT issue 19), reports a gramophone concert in 1908 (issue 8), and in a 1912 issue it publishes an article on the reception of the phonograph by indigenous Greenlanders on an ethnographic expedition (issue 12-14). The ethnographic theme is repeated the following year, now reporting the phonograph as recording device in the service of ethnographer Karl Tirén in his research on Sami yoiks (issue 7-8).

The interest quite obviously is not in the phonograph per se, but in the field recordings of music from distant cultures (e.g. SvD 120808, 121112, 121116, 130223, 130302, 131003, 140618), as reflected by the fact that by 1912 phonogram concerts are given at the ethnographic museum in Stockholm (Boström 2003, 30). This is an interest in reproduction of sound, in sound fidelity, which the ethnographer shares with the reviewers of the early gramophone concerts, and which was also promoted by sellers (for instance, Lyrophon marketed its record player as “representing song and music with full natural fidelity”, SvD 050917). However, the phonograph would continue to appear in the press for many years, mainly in ethnographic contexts.⁷ But when it comes to recordings of music for other than ethnographic purposes, the phonograph and the wax cylinder would soon be superseded by the gramophone and the shellac disc.

2) *Salongen revisited, or the mystery of the missing music machines (1913-1930)*

The Ladies’ Music Magazine, which was published from 1902 to 1913, contained sheet music, journalistic material, and commercial advertisements. It was primarily aimed at the female amateur musician of the bourgeoisie, offering “every home, wherein music is played, a collection of popular and pleasing salon- and dance pieces” (DM issue 1, 1902, see further Edin 2017). Around 1900, the salon in Sweden – *salongen* – had two major variants, the semi-public and the familial. The semi-public salon was hosted by the

⁶ All translations from Swedish by the author.

⁷ As still today in English, the term is sometimes used for the gramophone, as when a “victor phonograph with over 100 discs” is advertised for sale, SvD 280821).

families of the *haute-bourgeoisie* and often served as showcase for young and promising musicians, as well as trials for newly composed musical works. Whereas the semi-public salon often presented both national and international musical celebrities, the familial salon was a sheltered space for the family and its closest friends, wherein the daughters of the house were the prime performers (Öhrström 2007).

The Swedish *salong*, in both its versions, was a long-standing import from the continent (Germany and France), and as such it showed similarities with the parlor in the U.S.A. as described in the quoted sources above. Against the background of the reports in *The Ladies' Music Magazine*, *The Swedish Music Journal*, and the dailies, it would be quite justified to envision the place of the gramophone in the midst of the musical *salong*. But as said, there is reason for doubt. A well-informed cicerone to settle the case is the journal *Svenska hem i ord och bilder* (Swedish homes in words and pictures), issued monthly from 1913 to 1955. The journal is devoted to home reports from the upper class, consisting of literally thousands of photographs of interiors and detailed comments on the exquisite taste exhibited therein. One can assume that the readers of the journal belonged to the segment portrayed, i.e. the aristocracy, *haute bourgeoisie*, and on occasion, well known artists and cultural celebrities, but also that it included members of the lower classes who found the interiors desirable, inspiring and worth striving for.

During its first decade and a half, the journal brings the reader along on visits to several musical homes. Almost a half of the visited homes display a grand piano in the salon or living room (the two terms occur interchangeably already from the start: *salong*, *vardagsrum*). From famous sculptor Carl Milles, who keeps a 16th century Salzburger organ in his "Grand room" (aug 1913), to Cavalry Captain Thure Bielke's Clementi piano from the 1780s in "the salon" (march 1916), to Prince Eugen's residence *Waldemarsudde*, where the grand piano is seen not in the salon, but in the adjacent "music room" (nov 1915). None of the instruments are commented in the text, which however speaks explicitly of the home as "an expression of its owner's personality" (june 1914), as for instance that of Nobel laureate Selma Lagerlöf, which is said to have "organically grown around an original kernel, upon which annual layers are added one after the other" (feb 1918). Nevertheless, in spite of there being shown an uncommented horn gramophone in the very first issue of the journal, in the salon of Chamberlain Carl Lagerberg (march 1913), it is quite surprisingly no sign whatsoever of gramophones in any issue during this period. Not even in the homes of symphonic composers Hugo Alfvén (july 1914) or Wilhelm Peterson-Berger (sept 1915). It will take until 1930 before a gramophone is commercially advertised (March 1930), and until 1932 (p. 196f.) before a gramophone shows up in the editorial material of *Svenska hem i ord och bilder*. Until then the gramophone is virtually non-existent, a no-issue in matters of prestigious culture and display.

The striking absence of any kind of music machines, phonographs or gramophones in *Svenska hem* should be seen in the light of two parallel tendencies in the Swedish cultural climate during the period. These can be described as twofold criticism against what Norbert Elias (1994) later described as an antithesis between *culture* and *civilization*. In the Swedish case the two tendencies are never articulated as antitheses, but often occur intertwined (Stolare 2003, 27). Such is the case with, for instance, the conservative philosopher Vitalis Norström, who in his widely read essay *Masskultur*,

argues that civilization is the mastering of material nature, and in itself only a condition for the existence of culture, but never equal to it. Culture is spiritual and moral and stands over the materialist foundations of civilization. Modern society, “our culture’s civilization”, according to Norström, is an “apparatus” for communication which “overwhelms” our senses and becomes a “strait-jacket” for our souls, a hindrance for cultural development (Norström 1910, 6, 10f., 14, 20f.). As a consequence cultural forms and expressions are being replaced by the “anaesthetic of pleasure” (*njutningens narkos*) ultimately serving escapism and oblivion, a culture in the service of the uniform masses of civilization (ibid. 26).

Norström was influenced by German thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Georg Simmel (Hansson 1999, 119), and it is no coincident that many of the themes that appears in his critique would turn up also in the writings of the Frankfurt School a few decades later, albeit in a diametrically opposite political garb. But whereas for various reasons Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno were in the end positive to the mechanical reproduction of art and the long-playing record (and would more or less invert the value hierarchy between spirit and matter), Norström is silent on the subject. Nevertheless it is reasonable to assume that Norström’s culture and civilization criticism was a symptom of a widespread tendency in Sweden, which when it came to such specific matters as the phonograph and the gramophone resulted in a negative verdict. As a machine and technological innovation, the gramophone was a sign of civilization gone astray. That the *salongsgrammofon* (common name for luxurious cabinet gramophones) was marketed as such by the Stockholm retailers already in 1917 did not matter much (SvD 170903, 221108). And as to its content, the cylinders and discs were too obviously carriers of mass cultural expressions – anaesthetics of pleasure, to use Norström’s phrase – to be represented in the fine milieu of the musical *salong*.

To find any explicit expressions in the press of either of the two strains of this criticism – of civilization and of culture – levelled at the gramophone, we must turn from *Svenska hem* and look elsewhere. *Svenska Dagbladet* is a lavish case, although the two types of criticism can be difficult to disentangle. For instance, the gramophone is frequently characterized in terms of the ways it (supposedly) sounds. The gramophone clatters, honks, gargles, spews, rattles, bellows, and breaks loose, it bawls, bales, screams, crashes and whines, grinds, roars, rails, and disturbingly yells out of tune. On occasion the gramophone is used to characterize thoughtless persons (100622), repetitious politicians (180729) and teetotallers (200801), saucy women (140510), brainless Bolsheviks (240724), and even a composer such as Max Reger is likened to a gramophone, when his music is found too monotonous (180130).

In still other cases the gramophone is characterized – sometimes in passing, other times as the focal topic – by all the bad that it (supposedly) is or does. It puts musicians out of business (090318), it outcompetes the piano in the home (241115), and wears out any good melody (231112). It is accused of effacing the regrowth of musicians (190128) and of exterminating the authentic fiddler tradition (200530, 220526). It is dismissed as a surrogate for real music (210925), and as a means for fraud, magic, and bogus spiritism (220128, 220223, 230225, 231207). It is the factotum of the spiritual subclass (200620), shallow and unnecessary (191125), and a luxury for the rich and wasteful (190328). It is an instrument of torture (210908) and ultimately the tool of the devil himself, as in the reviewed trilogy *Satan the waster*, by Vernon Lee (201003). The point

is variously but clearly stated: the gramophone is a sign of the uncultivated (251110), it is but a toy (251129), and it certainly is not art (111112). “The line of taste cultivated by the means of ... gramophones, causes a spiritual industrialism, which is way worse than its material counterpart” (140224).

3) *Music for the many (1903-1925)*

In spite of all the negative publicity, the gramophone had come to stay. During the first decade of the 20th century it supersedes the phonograph as the major record player (not just in Sweden, but globally, Gelatt 1977, 158ff.; Gronow & Saunio, 1998, 6f.), mainly as a result of the ease of mass-producing gramophone discs as compared with the individually recorded phonograph cylinder. In 1899, forming the first part of an international expedition to record national artists and repertoires for local markets, the Gramophone Company stops in Stockholm to record as many as 119 Swedish song titles (among the other stops are cities as distantly apart as Porto and Istanbul). Another 156 songs are recorded in 1903, and by 1925, annual recording visits had produced more than 5400 music recordings (Gronow & Englund 2007, 284), adding up to a total of 12696 titles when competing labels are taken into account (Englund & Gronow 2011, 172, import not accounted for). The singers on the earliest recordings are well-known artists from the Royal Opera and various theatres in the capital, as well as popular artists like ballad singer Delsbostintan, and later accordionist Calle Jularbo and revue artist Ernst Rolf (Gronow & Englund 2007, 282ff.). Given that in 1899 there are hardly any gramophones in the country⁸ – it is reported as a technical innovation in the Stockholm dailies in conjunction with the 1903 recording sessions – one can assume that the early records are pressed in small numbers for demonstration purposes, as a main incentive is to market the new gramophone players.

In 1903 an early version of the jukebox is also exhibited to the public, a *Telefonografautomat* (Dahlqvist 2006, 186), but it never catches on in Sweden the way the jukebox does in the U.S. (it would take until after 1945 before it gains any wider popularity in the U.K. see Horn 2009). In the same year, 1903, Skandinaviska Grammophone AB is founded in Stockholm as a subsidiary of the Gramophone Company, and it soon faces competition by other companies recording Swedish artists, such as Columbia, Lyrophon and Pathé (Gronow & Englund 2007, 286ff.). The most serious competitor for many years is Carl Lindström AG, a German company founded by a Swede in 1904, manufacturing its own low-priced record players and controlling labels such as Parlophon and Odeon (Englund 2009, 73f.).

In line with the production rate, gramophones and records are regularly advertised in many papers and journals, even when there is limited editorial interest. Interestingly, during the first two decades of the century it often appears in advertisements for music instruments, as in the journals *Arbetarens vän* (The worker's friend), the protestant *Hem och Ungdom* (Home and Youth), and the unbound *Vi och vårt* (We and our's). The latter also hosts advertisements for records, which are repaired, as well as swapped (issues 2 and 3, 1910). Following these publications is the more long-lived *Hemmets Journal* (The Home's Journal), issued weekly from 1921 up to this day. It hosts advertisements both by instrument retailers, such as A. Th. Nilsson's music store in Norrköping, boasting

⁸ In 1891 a total of 19 phonographs were sold in Stockholm (Franzén et al 2008, 60).

“Violins, guitars, brass instruments, Italian accordions, talking machines and records, harmonicas, sheet music for sextet, and more” (several issues from 1921 to the mid 1930s), and by labels such as Pathéfon, and Grammophon. On a rare occasion, the latter promotes His Master’s Voice records with an advertisement displaying not only the company’s familiar logotype, but also a picture of two women talking at the side of a luxurious gramophone cabinet, the one telling the other, that “[y]ou can’t imagine, but I have put together such a nice program for our next dance evening!” (1923, issue 3). More common, however, is the type of advertisement by retailer Ernst G. Olin, for “Suitcase sized Gramophones” (1923, issue 19).

In the daily *Svenska Dagbladet* gramophones are advertised both by retailers and private sellers. The brands vary, as do the types of gramophone. The retailers generally advertise small players, whereas more exclusive types of cabinets occur when private owners want to dispose of them for some reason or other (such as upcoming “travels”, etc. SvD 200921). Cabinet models become frequent only in the 1920s, alongside the popular portable gramophone, or “travel-gramophone”, as it was called (*resegrammofon*, see Björnberg 2012). There is, in other words, a rather multifaceted and burgeoning market for gramophones and discs. And as usual with markets, it is not limited to producers and sellers, but also connects buyers and consumers. In the nationwide questionnaire *När grammofonen kom* (When the gramophone came), compiled by Nordiska Muséet in 1962, it is possible to read the recollections of (some of) those who were present at the time. The questionnaire explicitly asks for early memories of what was played on the gramophone, by whom, who owned it, where it was played (and heard), and which types, manufacturers and labels there was. The recollections span the first three decades of the century, but some go as far back as the 1890s.

The responses often consist of colourful personal memories, such as queuing to listen to some popular tune through tubes at a fair (around 1905): “it was mostly drunk labourers, half-drunk farmers, and us young lads”. Another recollection tells about the local priest’s warning for the devil’s voice in the horn, whereas yet another tells about a missionary meeting and the pastor winding the gramophone. A significant number of reminiscences are of private gramophones. For instance, one informant remembers hearing music on gramophone as a child at her cousin’s home around 1910, after which she doesn’t get the opportunity until many years later when working as a house maid and hearing the family’s daughter playing popular music. In addition to private listening at home, two other types of occasion appear in several reports. One is that of borrowing a gramophone to play for dance, either with a group of youngsters, or for engagement- or wedding parties (the earliest around 1905, the latest in 1928). The other recurring type of remembered occasion is hearing gramophone-music at the local café (with responses dating mostly from the 1910s).⁹

To see what characterizes these three categories – private listening in company at home, the private dance party, and the public café – in terms of the listeners’ relation to the gramophone and the music recorded, a fourth type of occasion can be added as heuristic contrast. This is the public dance event, viewed from the perspectives of the musicians

⁹ Although not mentioned in the replies to the questionnaire, it should be noted that in Stockholm for a few years in the early 1910s, and promoted by the Swedish Gramophone Company, some of the more fashionable cafés and restaurants gave gramophone concerts with famous singers such as Caruso on record, accompanied by a “live” orchestra of local musicians (SvD 110119, 121022, 131024).

and subsequently the record producers. In an article in *Svenska Dagbladet* in 1940, Eric Westberg, head of the Swedish copyright agency (STIM) warns against what he describes as “giant gramophone cabinets” that will “kill all dance orchestras” in the country. Moreover, the situation is as bad for the Café- and restaurant orchestras (SvD 400906). The musicians’ union’s reaction to the situation is fast and their complaint clear: mechanical music is *dead*, humanly performed music is *alive* and should therefore be the primary choice on any occasion (Fleischer 2012, 139ff., 192ff.). The claim of the musicians lay solid on the strand of familiar civilization criticism. As put in the journal *Musikern* (The Musician):

The machine, the gramophone, in improved shape, has wiped out human, living manpower. We stand in parallelism with the setters ... the weavers, telephone operators and all the other groups of manual labourers that have been displaced by the machine. (*Musikern*, issue 12 1930, quoted in Fleischer op cit. 171)

When, on the other hand, the recording industry had faced one of its many crises just a few years earlier,¹⁰ it claimed its recordings to be more than mere copies of performances, music recordings were original creations in their own right, the producer being akin to the photographer (Fleischer 2012, 229). Here the argument does not depend on civilization criticism, but claims for music recordings authentic cultural value like any other work of art: the recording business could not and should not be blamed for the musicians’ misfortunes.

However, as we return from the spokesmen of the record producers and the musicians, to the buyers of the gramophones and the consumers of the music recorded on its discs, we find nothing of this. During the early decades of the century, there are hardly any signs at all in the source material of any civilization- or culture criticism among gramophone users and record listeners (as in the musicians’ complaint). Neither are there any signs of exclusive “work” aesthetics, any anxiety of authenticity or originality (as in the record producers’ claim). When it comes to dancing at private parties or hearing music in the background privately at home or publicly at a café, there is no demand for audio fidelity in any technical sense. Instead the only quality that matters is functional efficacy. What counts as sounding good is that the music played on the gramophone should be good to dance to, and that the records play the songs you like to hear.¹¹ In this respect the gramophone is not only a mechanical instrument, as many of the advertisements in the press indicate (it is also mentioned on a par with the barrel organ, e.g. SvD 070521, 120827, 190601, 350609); it is a mechanical musician. This seemingly incongruous attitude among the consumers will not vanish, even when the gramophone and its records begin to gain a different status among a new group of listeners.

4) *Electronic recordings, cultural value, and an emerging media aesthetics* (1920-1945)

It takes until about 1920 before a change in attitude towards the gramophone can be observed in *Svenska Dagbladet*. Already in 1919 it appears as a prop in a short novel to

¹⁰ A crisis for which it however blamed the radio, not the musicians (Fleischer op cit.).

¹¹ Indicative of this attitude are advertisements such that of the Favorite label’s, who markets its records by only mentioning the song titles in its repertoire (SvD 051215), and Pathéfon, who announces records perfect for the summer’s dance occasions, without mention of either artist or tune (SvD 160608).

signal modernity (191126), and as such the gramophone will continue to function (e.g. 240730). During the first half the 1920s discussions of new improved gramophone models also occur (230413), along with what is possibly one of the earliest record reviews in the country, of Tchaikowsky's *Symphonie Pathétique* with The Royal Albert Hall Orchestra, conducted by Sir Landon Ronalds on His Master's Voice (231202). It is also noted that Italian composer Ottorini Respighi has recorded birdsong on a disc to be included in one of his compositions (250103).¹² Yet another article describes how gramophone music can be broadcasted through the new radio medium (240107), while one article stresses the importance of the then ten years old gramophone archive, which has not yet found a housing institution for its many recordings (250719). There is even a causerie about the gramophone as a future degree-subject in school (240405).

With its self-proclaimed mission to cover cultural issues, November 1928 marks a turning point for *Svenska Dagbladet* in its coverage of phonography. This is when one of its foremost music critics, composer Moses Pergament, begins a series of comprehensive record reviews titled *Grammofonmusik under kritik* (Gramophone music under criticism). The series is introduced programmatically, referring to the technical improvements of the technology, as well as cultural and entertaining advantages of both serious and popular repertoires (SvD 281109). The series rounds off a few months later with an educative description of the new electronic recording and playback technology (290208). The technology itself had been introduced internationally already in 1925 and electronically recorded discs were commercially advertised in *Svenska Dagbladet* in early 1926 (e.g. 260214).¹³

This embracing of technical innovation reveals a more modernist stance vis-a-vis the otherwise widespread civilization criticism, and it goes strategically hand in hand with a tendency to tie phonography to established cultural values. A telling instance is when the daily's other critic, musicologist Kajsa Rootzén, mentions Igor Stravinsky's interest in the gramophone and mechanical instruments (330813, 390528). Likewise an interview with Sergei Rachmaninoff works to the same effect (350208). The tendency can also be detected in comments on the utility of the gramophone in education (321128, 340904, 350228, 360903, 400211, 400909, 420823, 421007, 431017, 440423), and in the regular record reviews that for a couple of years would follow under the headings *Grammofonrevy* (1933-1934) and *Inspelat och avlyssnat* (1938-1939).

Whereas *Inspelat och avlyssnat* is almost exclusively dedicated to classical music, *Grammofonrevy* reviews a more balanced mix of both classical and popular genres, although with the proviso that there is a crucial difference between the good and the bad in popular music. Only once is jazz discussed under either heading (340401, 380424), although jazz on record is not lacking positive comments in the paper. Both Pergament and Rootzén publishes lengthy essays on jazz (250815, 440701), Rootzén also specifically on Duke Ellington and his recordings (350811), as well as an obituary of George Gershwin (370725). To fully understand the impact of *Svenska Dagbladet's* music

¹² On Swedish recordings of classical music, see Burlin 2008.

¹³ Trade magazines and specialist journals such as *Grammofon Journalen* (The Gramophone Journal), and *Radio och Grammofon* (Radio and Gramophone) crop up in the early 1930s, covering issues of lesser importance for this investigation, such as when trade magazine *Grafo* (issue 9, 1936) proposes a common distribution-central as solution to the problem faced by stockholding retailers when the record manufacturers in the mid 30s drastically cut prices by almost a half.

journalism – despite its undisguised highbrow ideals about art and culture (on Pergament’s far from unreserved opinion on jazz, see Rosengren 2007, 257ff.) – it should be gauged against an anti-Americanist form of culture- and civilization criticism common of the time. Drawing on the idealistic notion of *Volksgeist*, this form of criticism explicitly or implicitly dismisses any claim to an American culture, on the account that the U.S.A. does not qualify as a true nation (it is at best a savage nation of American Indians), but is rather a jumble of immigrants of different nationalities and primitive African cultures (cf. Volgsten 2013, 21ff.; Fornäs 2004, 193ff.). From such an anti-Americanist perspective the gramophone would only be one more machine from the country of decadence and decay, whereas the recorded sounds would hardly even qualify as music.

Alongside reviews of dance music on disc (e.g. 340805), a particularly interesting case of celebrity journalism in *Svenska Dagbladet* is an article that compares the different styles and personalities of Swedish vocalist Zarah Leander and Viennese Greta Keller, the first dramatic and spectacular, the other intimate, soft and whispering through the microphone, getting even closer to the listener with the recordings than in a live performance – as the reviewer notes: “Isn’t this a paradox?” (360913). The media aesthetics manifested in this article is a radically different way of approaching recorded music than that exemplified by the questionnaire cases, buttressing instead the artistic claims by the record producers. Especially Keller demonstrates a vocal technique made famous in the U.S.A. through Bing Crosby’s so called crooning style. In Sweden the foremost representative of the technique is singer Sven-Olof Sandberg, who pioneers electric recording in 1927 (Strand 2003), and whose “lovesick” baritone renders him nicknames like “the gramophone enchanter”, “the microphone voice” and “S. O. S.” (SvD 281109, 300409, 360112, 400112). However, in the review mentioned, both Keller and Leander also exemplify various degrees of authentic personality mediated through the recordings, which would not be possible were the gramophone serving merely as a mechanical musician (cf. Pontara & Volgsten forthcoming).

The review sections in *Svenska Dagbladet* would eventually disappear as the daily enters the atrocious 1940s. Advertisements for gramophones and records remain, now in company with appeals to hand in used discs for recycling, due to wartime scarcity of shellac (e.g. 441129).¹⁴

5) *The seizing of domestic space* (1923-1945)

As noted above, it would take until 1932 before a gramophone shows up in the editorial material of *Svenska hem i ord och bilder*. The home thus depicted is a radical exception. It is the modern villa of the famous functionalist architect Sven Markelius (and the player is portable, not a *salongsgrammofon*). Markelius, trained by Walter Gropius of the

¹⁴ In the weekly *Hemmets Journal* (The Home’s Journal) there is hardly any mention at all of gramophones in the editorial material by the mid 1930s, and gramophones and discs become more and more rare in the advertisements. Instead the space is devoted to the radio, which had national coverage through the Swedish national radio from 1925. It is not unlikely that the vital information broadcasted by the radio gives a more serious aura to the medium than what had till then been the case with the gramophone. When the Swedish national radio starts to broadcast recorded music from 1926 on (Björnberg 1998, 36), taking advantage of the new electronic technology, it is (expanding the hypothesis) not unlikely that music on gramophone at large benefitted from the “seriousness” of the radio medium.

Bauhaus school in Germany, was one of the authors of the pamphlet *acceptera!* that followed The Stockholm Exhibition of 1930. Among other things, the pamphlet displays a photo of a gramophone, with the statement (p. 124): “Luxury is for us the highest degree of quality, not of splendour”. In other words, the aversion for non-functional ornamentation does not condemn a mechanical and mass produced gadget such as the gramophone as long as it is well made and fulfils its function. The Stockholm Exhibition focussed on urban planning, architecture and design, and is generally regarded as a breakthrough in Sweden for modernist ideals. With the slogan *acceptera!* (accept!) it stood in diametrical contrast to the conservative civilization criticism, and with its functionalist aesthetic ideals it came to serve as ideological basis for the national housing policy for decades to come (Sydhoff 1980).¹⁵ The Stockholm Exhibition had been preceded since the early 1920s by annual housing exhibitions, *Bygge och bo* (Building and home), which in 1928 promotes the modern living room as opposed to the old bourgeois *salong* (or *finrum*, as it was also called). Whereas the *salong* is accused of being overloaded and dysfunctional, the modern living room “gives the richest possible impression through the smallest means” (quoted in Perers 2001, 90). Two years earlier, in the 1926 exhibition, a gramophone had even made its way into the very plan for a 40 m² flat, designed for a family of four persons (Bilder och blad 1926, 42f. repeated the following year p. 28). And later the exhibition *Vi bo* (We live) in Malmö would likewise reserve space in one of its apartment plans for a “radio-gramophone” (*Vi bo i Ribershus* 1938, 34), as did the exhibition *Bo bättre* (Live better) in Gothenburg in 1945 for a “gramophone cabinet”.

The modernist ideals of The Stockholm Exhibition were expressed to a wider public in journals such as *Nutidens hem* (The home of the present), and *Hemkultur* (Home culture). *Nutidens hem*, whose leader explicitly promotes “democratisation of ways of thinking and living”, opens its first issue in 1935 with an article on the new living room. It says nothing about gramophones. However, a later issue discusses “Music in the home”, wherein the supposed dangers of gramophone listening are dismissed, although it is claimed that “passive” listening can never reach the cultivated heights of “active”

¹⁵ By contrast, the gramophone never showed up in any plans or displays of the Swedish home ownership project. As a consequence of widespread poverty and even starvation in the northern regions, Sweden had faced a massive emigration resulting in 20% of the male and 15% of the female population born during the latter half of 19th century leaving the country, mainly for North America (Thorborg 2013). Beginning in 1904, in response to a steadily growing “Home Ownership” (*egnahem*) movement, with the common aim to decrease emigration, the government set up low interest loan funds to enable people with limited means to obtain a home of their own. Starting in the rural areas, the movement soon led to *egnahems*-areas at the suburban outskirts of the cities (Kjellberg 1999). The journal *Egna Hem* (“Own Home”), issued monthly between 1901 and 1907, with a motto that emphasized “diligence, thrift, and Godliness “ as the means to earn “your own home on your own land”, contained building plans and advice how best to cultivate one’s small lot, and on a couple of occasions advertisements for pianos and organs (issues 4 and 6, 1902). Given its motto and target group of crofters and small tenants, it is perhaps to be expected that phonographs and gramophones are neither mentioned nor depicted in any of the journal’s issues. In the slightly more well-off oriented *Sveriges villa- och egnahems-tidning* (Sweden’s Bungalow- and own home-journal), issued monthly between 1909 and 1914, there are piano scores for Boston waltzes in a couple of Christmas issues (1910 and 1911), but still no mention of phonographs or gramophones. However, a horn-gramophone is depicted in advertisements for “musical instruments” (issues 6, 1911 through 12, 1912). A likely clue to the absence is the culture- and civilization criticism that marked, not only the wealthy *salong*, but also the home ownership movement. The pervasive ideal in the home ownership movement was the manual cultivation – of the soil rather than soul – of one’s own lot (Edling 1996, 295ff.).

playing (issue 4). The more middlebrow *Hemkultur* offers regular record reviews, which usually starts with classical recordings while presenting popular novelties towards the end. One article refers positively to “England, where the gramophone has a more than usual noble position”, and rhetorically asks the reader “Do you take care of your records?” (1935, issue 1). Although both journals were short lived, the ideals promoted were not (cf. Perers et al. 2013).¹⁶ Even the good old *Svenska hem* continues to expose the gramophone, both in the editorial material (e.g. issue 2, 1936, showing a “bachelor’s flat” with a “hat-box gramophone”, and issue 10, 1940, showing an “in every respect exemplary radio gramophone”, “a piece of furniture not attempting to be anything it is not”), and in the advertisement sections (e.g. issue 10 1939, a “parchment coated” gramophone box from the posh design store Svenskt Tenn). A report from a flower exhibition discloses the idea behind the growing interest in the gramophone: “*Leisure time will create harmonious people*” (issue 7, 1936, italics in original).

But leisure time requires leisure space. If there is no place to relaxingly spend one’s free time, it will lose its recreational worth. An interesting but unacknowledged and hardly intended model for the particular space required for the gramophone and its music can be observed in advertisements for gramophones starting in 1923, and a few years later for records (SvD 230317, 231209, 290419, 430926). In these advertisements the particular retailers boasts especially designed listening rooms (or rather closets) in their stores. The significance of these listening rooms is not that they allowed the listener to appreciate the fidelity of the sound reproduction technology (that the quality of sound production be a “natural” condition for aesthetic output had by the 1920s become a common selling point, cf. Siefert 1995). On the contrary, the crucial point is the affordance of a shielded space where the listener is able to hear music while being both unobserved and undisturbed. This differs from the *salong* as well as the phonograph attractions at the countryside fairs, both of which were collective displays. In the *salong* the music was played and listen to in company with others, and although the recorded sounds at the fairs were not audible except through tubes, the listening act and reactions of the listeners were part of the spectacle (the case resembles the American phonograph parlors of the 1890s, cf. Kenney 1999, 26). A more likely precursor is the telephone booth, separating “hearing from the proximal auditory environment”, while “the act of communication itself” is “separated from the surrounding physical environment” (Sterne 2003, 158). For the new media aesthetics described in the previous section to come to full fruition, a secluded space was to be preferred. And this was arguably also the case for the sound experience behind the growing amount of reviews of classical music recordings (cf. Gauß op cit. 314; Pontara & Volgsten, forthcoming). Intimate encounters with caressing crooners, like penetration of the spiritual depths of classical works, both thrive in undisturbed solitude.

But although the gramophone to an extent (however small, as judged from the housing plans) was part of the definition of the modern living room, for many a solitary space at home was at most a wishful thinking. In 1945, thirty per cent of the Swedish population shared room in their homes with at least two others, kitchens not counted (Perers et al. op cit., 71). The contrast is striking when one turns from the well-off milieus depicted in journals such as *Svenska hem i ord och bilder* and *Nutidens hem*, to those addressed in

¹⁶ From the early 1930s on, Swedish sound film increasingly portrayed gramophone listening in the living room, see Pontara (forthcoming).

Vår bostad (Our home), the journal of the members of the National Tenants Association. *Vår bostad*, issued from 1924 on, covers actual and important issues of accommodation and everyday home matters (such as “vacation for housewives”, Jan 1937), as well as entertainment sections. When it comes to record playing, which one understands is frequently occurring in the tenement houses concerned, it is by no way a sign of “harmonious” neighbours getting together, but a serious environmental problem in want of strict regulation (March 1932, the problem, which by this time also includes the radio, crops up frequently as brief notes and comments in the daily *Svenska Dagbladet*). And to the extent that the editorial material is concerned with cultural issues, it promotes traditional piano playing, while parents are advised to keep their children away from “that Hydra, which is called jazz music” (Dec 1925). Among its many depicted home interiors, a gramophone does not show up in *Vår bostad* until May 1945, when the journal pays a visit at the home of famous musician Carl Jularbo jr, observing that “In the combined bed- and living room stands a lovely radio-gramophone”.

Concluding remarks: mediatization, musicalization, and the phonography of everyday life
In Sweden the entrance of the phonograph did not take place in the living room. And neither did the gramophone. It rather occurred at fairs, on dance events and at cafés and restaurants (the phonograph’s role during the first decades of the 20th century seems mainly to have been as a device for recording and displaying ethnographic research). Records were danced to and heard at occasions and events not particularly designed for attentive music listening. So-called gramophone concerts were exceptional, and were economically backed up by promotional incentives. The gramophone was played like a mechanical instrument, or (considering the anger it would cause in the musicians’ union) it appeared more or less as a mechanical musician. In either case it needed no particular training or skill on the part of the player (in the way “real” instruments do), which lead its detractors to denounce the gramophone as a inhumane machine or as a mere a toy.

Considering the records of this early period, they were not particularly regarded as representations of artistic performance or of any aesthetic content to be extracted by the listeners. Musical recordings were not primarily regarded as media, but as integral to the record players (the early manufacturers provided their own record labels). Not until the course of the 1920s can a change in aesthetic attitude be observed. Interestingly, the change goes hand in hand with a change in the spatial localization of the gramophone, from public cafés and the undefined locales of private dance events, to the intimate and – yet only for a few – solitary privacy of the modern living room.

A picture hereby emerges of how phonography turned from being a scientific invention into becoming an everyday media technology. We can also detect some important contours of its mediatizing influence on culture and everyday musical communication. During the first decades of the 20th century the most significant aspect is probably the de-professionalizing of musical communication and performance that the gramophone affords. Anyone can now play a piece of dance music, a ballad or even an entire symphony privately at home or in public.

Up to this point the on-going change is quite reasonably explained in terms of a mediatization of music, i.e. a long-term process by which new recording technology

affects musical communication and interaction (cf. Krotz 2009, 24). However, in line with the living room successively becoming a reality in an increasing number of homes, it is as much the increasing presence of music as that of the gramophone that calls for explanation. At a closer look the need for explanation is apparent already in the case of the de-professionalized use of the gramophone during the early decades. To the extent that the epithet *talking-machine* is discarded and music becomes the dominating content of the recordings, the process is arguably as much an instance of mediatization of music as it is an instance of *musicalization* of the medium (cf. Pontara & Volgsten 2017). This becomes even more evident as the gramophone takes part in the very definition of what kind of space the living room is (and by extension also what recreational leisure-time is). Seemingly inconspicuous though important parts in this process are the record review and the listening room. Not only does the record review add a serious dimension to the music (the record is worthy of qualified discussion); the review itself also adds to the discursive definitions by which “music is constituted as what it is”, and thus diffuses music, beyond the immediate encounters of those already in possession of a record, to a reading mass public (Pontara & Volgsten op cit; the radio, though beyond the limits of this investigation, significantly adds to this aspect of musicalization, see Björnberg 1998, 36-39, et passim). Considering the listening room, on the other hand, it conveys the more centripetal attitude that listening to music on gramophone is best done in solitude in a room specially furnished for its purpose (an attitude turned into a necessity in the practice of the record reviewer). Or, put differently, that the living room is best furnished so as to facilitate focussed and undisturbed listening to music.

Thus we seem to end up with two mutually excluding technological strains influencing culture and everyday life during the first half of the 20th century. One more anarchic, involving the gramophone as a mechanical instrument at more or less unforeseeable locales, with dance and diverted listening to popular music. The other, demanding the controllable solitary space that only a modern living room can afford, in the service of a new media aesthetics that promotes focussed listening to the musical content of the records. However, that the two strains are not completely exclusive becomes evident when we consider the novelty of the aforementioned media aesthetics; in contrast to the “disinterested” listening demanded by 19th century classical music, this new aesthetics is equally inviting of classical as of popular music. It is even a requisite for the popular styles represented by singers such as Bing Crosby, Greta Keller and Sven-Olof Sandberg. And it will prove necessary for future styles following the wake of The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s*, The Beach Boys’ *Good Vibrations*, and Frank Zappa’s *Freak Out!*.

On the other hand, using the gramophone as a mechanical instrument portable to whatever location suitable for the occasion is an attitude that would remain even when stationary gramophone-cabinets had made themselves comfortable in the new living rooms. It would lie at heart of future uses such as the portable teenage-room player, movable sound-systems, modern dance music of every kind, and new styles mixing live and pre-recorded sound and music. And as the Walkman maps the territory for future digital devices, new ways of listening to classical music inevitably get together.

What the focus on phonography in a peripheral country such as early to mid-20th century Sweden brings to the fore, then, is nothing less than an analytically contrasting picture showing two irreducible aspects of contemporary technology of musicking.

Printed sources:

Arbetarens vän (monthly 1900-1911)
Damernas Musikblad (twice monthly 1902-1913)
Egna Hem (monthly 1901-1907)
Egnahemsbyggaren. Tidning för hvarje hem (four issues 1910-1911)
Grafo. Organ för grammofon-, radio- och fotobranschen (monthly 1931-1939)
Grammofon-journalen (five issues 1930)
Hem och Ungdom, Illustrerad veckotidning (weekly 1917-1920).
Hemma. Tidning för hemmet och familjen (monthly 1924-1931)
Hemmets journal (weekly 1921-1945)
Hemmets tidning (monthly 1910-1929)
Hemkultur (monthly 1935-1937)
Liv. Veckotidning för hem och familj (weekly 1937-1940)
Musik-Tidningen (monthly 1900-1927)
Nutidens hem. Tidskrift för heminredning och möbelkonst (monthly 1935-1936)
Orfeus. Tidskrift för litteratur, musik, teater (1924-1927)
Radio och grammofon (1929-1931)
Svenska Dagbladet (daily 1900-1945)
Svenska hem i ord och bilder (monthly 1913-1945)
Sveriges villa- och egnahems-tidning (monthly 1909-1914)
Teatern. Tidskrift för teater, musik, film (monthly 1934-1945)
Vi och vårt. Illustrerad tidskrift för svenska hem (monthly 1910-1912)
Vår bostad. Organ för Hyresgästernas och HSB:s riksförbund (monthly 1924-1945)
Våra nöjen (monthly 1925-1944)

Exhibition programs and catalogues:

Bygge och bo 1922-1929. 1925, 1927, 1930, 1935, 1945 ???????

Stockholm 1930, Lidingö, Malmö, ??????

Nordiska muséets frågelista, 1962 "När grammofonen kom"

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