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Hungarian Documents of The Gramophone Company

Application for a CLPGS Richard Taylor Bursary

Summary of the planned project

The early Hungarian recording history is closely related to the early British gramophone industry. Budapest was one of the six stations of the first recording tour of The Gramophone Company in 1899 and the recording experts of the Company returned to Budapest almost every year until 1914.¹ The early recordings of the Company were organized by the Vienna Branch until 1907, when the Hungarian Branch was opened. During the Great War, Hungarian “Gramophone” recordings were made abroad,² but HMV returned to Hungary and became one of the most important recording firms there during the electrical era. The first Hungarian recording series on state order were also made by the HMV in December 1928 (*Hungarian Music on Gramophone Discs*, ed. by Zoltán Kodály, László Lajtha et al.).

In his large discography project, Alan Kelly compiled the list of the pre-1930 Hungarian recordings of The Gramophone Company.³ However, the background of the recordings, that is, the activities of the Hungarian Branch, are mostly unrevealed. In the frame of the proposed project, I intend to do research on the archive documents (business papers, contracts, correspondence etc.) of the Hungarian activity of The Gramophone Company and HMV. The CLPGS Richard Taylor Bursary could give me a lead on conducting this research from both sides: I have access to the Hungarian papers of the Budapest Branch of The Gramophone Company which are preserved at the Budapest City Archives to some extent, but knowledge of the files kept by the EMI Archive in Hayes would be essential to an exhaustive examination. Moreover, because of the structure of the Company, not only the Hungarian files, but also the (pre-1907) files of the Vienna Branch have to be explored. I have been in contact with the EMI Archive since 2013, but up until now I only had the possibility for a few short-time (one or two days) researches in 2014 and 2015.⁴

Alan Kelly processed the Hungarian recordings of The Gramophone Company only up to 1930, and I hope that this research will help to compliment my previously compiled lists of the recordings published on HMV label after 1930. Furthermore, since it is stated on the homepage of the EMI Archive Trust that they own documents connected to the pre-Lindström labels as well, the CLPGS Richard Taylor Bursary could provide a great possibility to support further research on Hungarian recording history.

¹ On the early Hungarian activity of The Gramophone Company see my article: „At the very beginning: The first Hungarian operatic recordings on the Gramophon label between 1902 and 1905.” In: Pekka Gronow – Christiane Hofer (eds.): *The Lindström Project Vol. 4*. (Vienna: GHT, 2012): 51–60.

² See my article „»Magyar hangok« a háborúból. Az első világháború és a magyar hanglemeztörténet” [Hungarian Voices from the War. The Great War and the Hungarian Recording History] *Magyar Zene* LIII/3 (August 2015): 277–304.

³ Alan Kelly: *The Gramophone Company Limited. His Master’s Voice. The Central European Catalogue (70000 to 79999). 1899 to 1929*. (published on CD-ROM, 2009).

⁴ The basis of my information about the EMI Archives is my meeting with Allan Kelly in 2013 in York.