

Early Wagner Recordings on Cylinder and Disk

PART 2

Charles C. Sorrell

School of Materials Sci & Eng.
UNSW Sydney
Sydney, NSW 2052

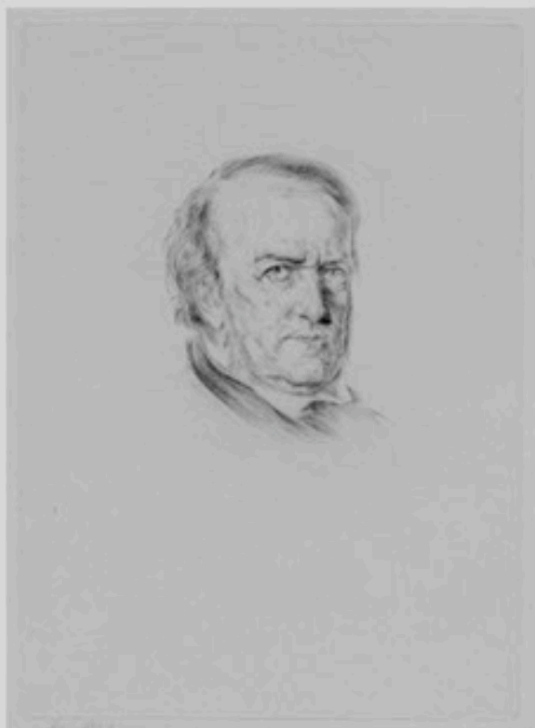
E-mail C.Sorrell@unsw.edu.au

Wagner Society NSW

Goethe Institut
Event Hall

90 Ocean Street
Woollahra, NSW 2025

21 June 2026



Wagner

Etching by Edgar Chahine
From Maurice Barrès, *Novembre*,
Devambez, Paris, 1926



Thomas Alva Edison

Photograph 1888
From William H. Meadowcroft,
The Boy's Life of Edison, Harper &
Brothers, New York, 1911

Edison Phonographs – Electricity-Driven, External Horn

Class M – Battery-Powered (1889-1892)



*Rental Rate
(1889-1891)
US\$40 p.a.
(US\$1460 p.a.)*



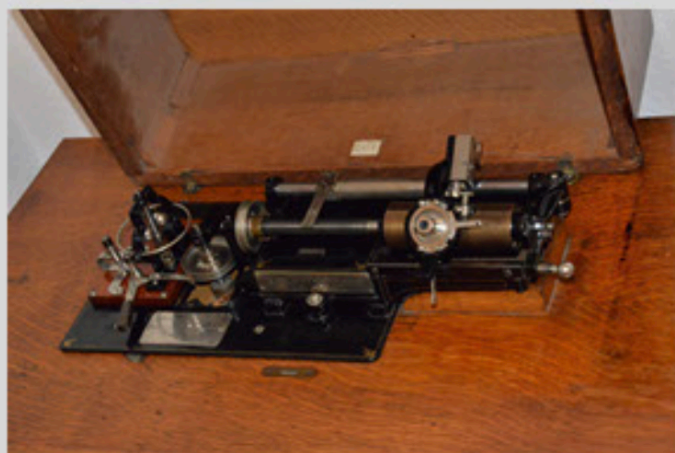
*Purchase Cost
(1891-1892)
US\$150
(US\$5410)*

Edison Phonographs – Electricity-Driven, External Horn

Class E – Electric-Motor-Powered (1889-1892)



**Rental Rate
(1889-1891)**
US\$40 p.a.
(US\$1460 p.a.)



**Purchase Cost
(1891-1892)**
US\$150
(US\$5410)

Edison Phonographs – Spring-Driven, External Horns



TRIUMPH
Model A



STANDARD
Model A



HOME
Model A and B



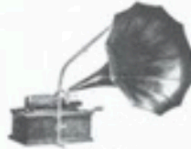
GEM
Model A



TRIUMPH
Model B



STANDARD
Model B



HOME
Model C and D



GEM
Model B and C



TRIUMPH
Model C and D



STANDARD
Model C and D



HOME
Model E, F and G



GEM
Model D and E



TRIUMPH
Model E, F and G



STANDARD
Model E, F and G



FIRESIDE
Model A



FIRESIDE
Model B



BALMORAL
Model H and I



IDELIA
Model D1



IDELIA
Model D3



OPERA

Edison Phonographs – Spring-Driven, Internal Horns



Amberola 30 (1915-1929)
Cost US\$30 (US\$42 in 1918-1920)
(US\$1000-564)



Amberola 50 (1915-1929)
Cost US\$50 (US\$68 in 1918-1920)
(US\$1650-940)



Amberola 75 (1915-1929)
Cost US\$75 (US\$100 in 1918-1920)
(US\$2480-1410)

Edison Gems Models A to E



*Cost US\$7.50
(US\$250)*

Gem – Model A (1899-1905)



*Cost US\$10
(US\$335)*

Gem – Model B (1905-1908)



*Cost US\$12.50
(US\$415)*

Gem – Model C (1908-1909)



Gem – Model D (1908-1911)

*Cost US\$15
(US\$500)*



Gem – Model E (1911-1914)

Edison Opera and Concert



Opera – Oak

Edison Opera introduced in November 1911 (serial numbers 101 to 3841)

Name changed to *Edison Concert* in October 1912 due to trademark dispute (serial numbers 3974 to 4675

[The serial number of the mahogany instrument being used is 4672]

Total production run of 4574 units

Cost US\$90-100 (US\$3150-3500)

Last units provided to dealers in December 1913

Existing stock exhausted by 1914



Opera – Mahogany

Playlist

Edison Number	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
1614	<i>Bridal Chorus</i>	<i>Lohengrin</i>	Metropolitan Quartet	Orchestral Accompaniment
2527	<i>Overture</i>	<i>Rienzi</i>	Brass Orchestra	Edwin Franko Goldman, Conductor
2529	<i>March</i>	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Sodero's Band	Cesare Sodero, Conductor
2668	<i>Introduction 3rd Act</i>	<i>Lohengrin</i>	American Symphony Orchestra	Orchestra
3732	<i>Wedding March</i>	<i>Lohengrin</i>	N.Y. Military Band	Concert Band
28119	<i>O du mein Holder Abendstern</i>	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Fritz Feinhals (1869-1940)	Orchestral Accompaniment
28177	<i>Prize Song</i>	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	Albert Spalding (1888-1953)	Violin and Piano
28196	<i>The Evening Star</i>	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Thomas Chalmers (1884-1966)	Orchestral Accompaniment
28204	<i>Mein Lieber Schwaan!</i>	<i>Lohengrin</i>	Jacques Urlus (1867-1935)	Orchestral Accompaniment

Edison Blue Amberol 1614

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
1614	1913	<i>Bridal Chorus</i>	<i>Lohengrin</i>	Metropolitan Quartet	Orchestral Accompaniment

Unnamed orchestra and conductor

Direct recording

The Metropolitan Quartet was a prominent vocal group that recorded for Edison (1911-1929), Victor (1912-1913), and Columbia (1916-1917). Their work was known for its lush arrangements, typically featuring a mixed choir of operatic voices accompanied by orchestra. The most famous member was Thomas Chalmers, who replaced Frederick Wheeler in late 1913. The quartet otherwise consisted of Florence Hinkle, Margaret Keyes, Harry Anthony (*aka* John Young), and Frederick Wheeler. Margaret Keyes replaced Mary Porter Mitchell in 1909.



Florence Hinkle
(1885-1933)
Soprano



Margaret Keyes
(1880-1941)
Contralto



Harry Anthony
(1870-1954)
Tenor



Frederick Wheeler
(1877-1951)
Baritone

Edison Blue Amberol 2527

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
2527	1915	<i>Overture</i>	<i>Rienzi</i>	Brass Orchestra	Edwin Franko Goldman, Conductor

Brass Orchestra (probably Sodero's Band conducted by Cesare Sodero)

The cylinder states that accompaniment was provided by the Brass Orchestra (typically brass and percussion), which recorded for Edison during 1912-1913. However, the UCSB database for cylinders states that accompaniment was provided by the Edison Concert Band (typically brass, percussion, and woodwinds). The same database states that the recording is dubbed from Edison DD 2519. The UCSB database for disks states that that DD 2519 is a 1913 performance by Sodero's band, conducted by Cesare Sodero, and it cross references the cylinder. This is considered to be the most likely scenario. See Edison Blue Amberol 2529 for information on Sodero's Band and Cesare Sodero.

Dubbed from Edison DD 2519



Edison Recording Session (1916)

Edison Blue Amberol 2529

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
2529	1915	<i>March</i>	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Sodero's Band	Cesare Sodero, Conductor

Sodero's Band conducted by Cesare Sodero

Dubbed from Edison DD 2516

Cesare Sodero was an Italian cellist, conductor, and composer who was born in Naples and emigrated at the age of 20 to the US, where he spent the rest of his life. His recordings span 1913-1926 (Edison) and then 1939 (Decca). For Edison, he conducted Sodero's Band during 1913-1925 and the American Symphony Orchestra during 1914-1925. His instrumental recordings during this time are considered to be some of the most colourful and imaginative of the entire acoustical recording era. After leaving Edison in 1925, he pioneered full opera radio broadcasts by the NBC Radio Ensembles during 1925-1934 and NBC Symphony Orchestra during 1926-1934. He composed the opera *Ombre Russe*, which was premiered by the NBC Symphony Orchestra on 27 May 1929. This was a landmark event as it was the first American opera to receive its world premiere by radio broadcast. It had its stage premiere on 19 June 1930 at Teatro La Fenice in Venice, where it received glowing reviews. These engagements were followed by leadership of the Mutual Radio Network orchestras during 1934-1940. He subsequently became Principal Conductor of the Italian wing of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus from 1942 until his death in 1947.



Cesare Sodero
(1886-1947)
Conductor/Composer

Edison Blue Amberol 2668

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
2668	1915	<i>Introduction 3rd Act</i>	<i>Lohengrin</i>	American Symphony Orchestra	Orchestra

Unnamed conductor (probably Cesare Sodero)

Since Cesare Sodero conducted Edison's American Symphony Orchestra during 1914-1925, it is almost certain that he is the unacknowledged conductor. The American Symphony Orchestra, which was based in West Orange, NJ, recorded Diamond Disks for Edison during 1912-1927. This ensemble should not be confused with the orchestra founded in 1962 in New York City by Leopold Stockowski. The American Symphony Orchestra effectively was the house ensemble for Edison. It was known to be adept at adapting works to fit within the audio and time constraints of early acoustic recordings. See Edison Blue Amberol 2529 for information on Cesare Sodero.

Dubbed from Edison DD 3860



Edison Recording Session (1917)

Edison Blue Amberol 3732

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
3732	1919	<i>Wedding March</i>	<i>Lohengrin</i>	N.Y. Military Band	Concert Band

N.Y. Military Band conducted by Edwin Franko Goldman

Dubbed from Edison DD 6525

The Edison Military Band was formed in January 1897 as the house ensemble for Edison, changing its formal name to the New York Military Band in October 1908. In 1911, it was reorganised under the leadership of the American trumpeter, conductor, and composer Edwin Franko Goldman (1878-1956), subsequently transitioning to the Goldman Band in 1918. In its various forms, the ensemble recorded for Edison during 1908-1928. The UCSB database for cylinders lists John Philip Sousa (1854-1932) as having a connection to this recording. As Sousa is known not to have conducted the N.Y. Military Band since he was conducting his eponymously named Sousa's Band in 1919, this suggests that the arrangement played was Sousa's. Edwin Franko Goldman composed over one hundred and fifty works, of which the best known are marches. His career commenced with his joining the Metropolitan Opera House as a trumpeter in 1893 at the age of 15, remaining there until 1909. He founded the American Bandmasters Association in 1929 in order to promote concert band music; this organisation still is in existence. During the 1930s and 1940s, the Goldman Band performed regularly in New York for NBC, which brought classical transcriptions, newly commissioned works, and high-quality band arrangements to the attention of millions of radio listeners. His work for the radio industry earned him a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 6410 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles.



**Edwin Franko Goldman
(1878-1956)
Conductor/Composer**

Edison Blue Amberol Concert 28119

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
28119	1912	<i>O du mein Holder Abendstern</i>	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Fritz Feinhals (1869-1940)	Orchestral Accompaniment

Unnamed orchestra and conductor

Fritz Feinhals was a German baritone who recorded for Berliner in 1901, Odeon during 1907-1909, Gramophone during 1909-1911, and Edison during 1910-1913. He began his career at the Stadttheater Essen during 1895-1897 and the Stadttheater Mainz during 1897-1898. He then joined the Münchner Hofoper (later the Bavarian State Opera) in 1898, remaining there until his retirement in 1927. During 1900-1919, he also performed at the Deutsches Theater in Prague, Königliche Hofoper in Berlin, Komische Oper in Berlin, Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin, Hoftheater Stuttgart, Grossherzogliches Hoftheater Karlsruhe, Grossherzogliches Hoftheater Mannheim, and Alte Oper in Frankfurt am Main. At the Wagner Festivals in the Prinzregententheater in Munich during 1901-1923, he appeared as Hans Sachs, Wotan, Telramund, Amfortas, and Kurwenal, each time with great success. He sang at Covent Garden as Telramund in 1907. He performed frequently at the Wiener Hofoper in Vienna during 1905-1921. He debuted as Wotan in *Die Walküre* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1908, being engaged for the 1908 and 1909 seasons. His powerful voice and imposing presence made him one of the leading interpreters of Richard Wagner's operatic characters. While he was a Wagnerian singer par excellence, he was renowned as a great actor on the opera stage; he also had a very successful career as a concert and oratorio singer. He was married to Elise Feinhals (1869-1924), a mezzo-soprano who worked with Mahler; she sang the mezzo-soprano part in the Munich premiere of Mahler's 2nd Symphony in 1900 under the direction of Mahler.

Direct Recording



Fritz Feinhals
(1869-1940)
Baritone

Edison Blue Amberol Concert 28177

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
28177	1913	<i>Prize Song</i>	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	Albert Spalding (1888-1953)	Violin and Piano

Unnamed pianist

Reissue of Direct Recording 28007 (Amberol)

Albert Spalding was an American violinist and composer. He was considered one of the leading violinists of the day. He recorded for Edison during 1910-1929, Victor during 1915 and 1926-1941, Columbia in 1929, Brunswick during 1925-1928, RCA Victor during 1929-1931, Remington during 1950-1952, and Halo in 1953 (published posthumously in 1957). His professional debut as a violin soloist was at age 17 at the Nouveau Théâtre in Paris on 6 June 1906, performing the Saint-Saëns Violin Concerto No. 3 with the Concerts Colonne Orchestra under the conductor Édouard Colonne (1838-1910). He debuted in the US as violin soloist at Carnegie Hall on 8 November 1908, performing the same concerto with the New York Symphony Orchestra under the conductor Walter Damrosch (1862-1950). Damrosch anointed him as *the first great instrumentalist this country has produced*. He is perhaps best known for having given the world premiere of the Samuel Barber Violin Concerto on 7 February 1941 with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the conductor Eugene Ormandy. During his career, which spanned 45 years to end in 1950, he performed with many major orchestras, including the Dresdner Philharmonie in Dresden (1909), Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in Paris (being the first American violinist to appear with this ensemble, 1922), Wiener Symphoniker in Vienna (1952), and Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich in Vienna (1952). He authored an autobiography, *Rise to Follow* (1943) and a novel, *A Fiddle, a Sword, and a Lady* (1953). The work recorded is an arrangement for violin and piano by August Emil Daniel Ferdinand Wilhelmj (1845-1908), who was a close friend of Wagner. Wilhelmj led the violins at the 1876 premiere of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.



Albert Spalding
(1888-1953)
Violinist

Edison Blue Amberol Concert 28196

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
28196	1915	<i>The Evening Star</i>	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Thomas Chalmers (1884-1966)	Orchestral Accompaniment

Unnamed orchestra and conductor

Thomas Hardie Chalmers was an American opera singer and stage, film, and television actor. His operatic and folk-song work was recorded exclusively for Edison during 1912-1922. Edison considered him to be one of his favourite baritones due to his clear phrasing with minimal vibrato. He made his operatic debut in 1911 as Marcello in *La Bohème* at Fossombrone, Italy, which hosted classical and opera performances. Upon his return to the US, he toured with the English Grand Opera Company in 1911. This was followed by his becoming lead baritone for the Century Opera Company and the National Opera Company during 1912-1917, during which time he was praised for the elegance and polish of his vocal style. He debuted with the Metropolitan Opera on 17 November 1917 as Valentin in *Faust*. He is considered to be the first American-born baritone to sing with the Metropolitan Opera. During his 5-year tenure there, he sang with Enrico Caruso (1873-1921) and Geraldine Farrar (1882-1967), becoming known for his French and Italian lyric and dramatic roles. Chalmers' technique as opera performer is characterised in terms of vocal beauty and elegance, robust but polished style, intelligence of phrasing, and exceptional acting. Following a tonsillectomy at the end of the 1922 season at the Metropolitan Opera, he gave up singing and transitioned to acting on the stage, working on Broadway until 1961. He also played supporting roles in two silent films, *Puritan Passions* (1923) and *Blind Alleys* (1927). He directed early short sound films for Fox Movietone during 1928-1929, narrated documentaries during 1936-1938, and played character roles in feature films during 1957-1964. He also was active in early television, being a frequent guest star in many series during the 1950s and 1960s.

Direct Recording



**Thomas Chalmers
(1884-1966)
Baritone**

Edison Blue Amberol Concert 28204

Matrix Number	Year of Release	Work	Opera	Performer	Comments
28204	1915	<i>Mein Lieber Schwaan!</i>	<i>Lohengrin</i>	Jacques Urlus (1867-1935)	Orchestral Accompaniment

Unnamed orchestra and conductor

Jacques Urlus was a Dutch dramatic tenor who effectively was self-taught. His recording career included performances for Pathé in 1903, Gramophone during 1907-1924, Edison during 1913-1917, and Odeon in 1917. His stage career commenced with his appointment as the principal tenor at the Nederlandsche Opera in Amsterdam during 1894-1899, although he continued to perform there until 1934. In 1898, he performed the title roles *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* at the *Königliches Hoftheater* (now the Staatsoper Hannover), where he was critically acclaimed, particularly in the former role. He used this success as a springboard to audition for Cosima Wagner in 1898 but he was not invited to sing. However, Bayreuth welcomed him during the 1911 and 1912 seasons as Siegmund in *Die Walküre*, which was a triumph. In the former year, he stepped in at the last moment to replace the ailing Alfred von Bary (1873-1926) as Siegfried, thus establishing Urlus' versatility. He premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 1913 as Tristan but this was a disaster as he had a cold and lost his voice. Only a week later, he triumphed as Siegfried and restored his reputation, cementing his legendary position as the Metropolitan Opera's lead heldentenor, a position that he held until 1917. During his professional life, Urlus gained a reputation as a specialist in the vocal works of Mahler. Today, Urlus is regarded as being one of the greatest Wagner interpreters of all time. His recordings of the music of Wagner are considered to be amongst the finest ever made. His last performance of Wagner was as Tristan on 19 November 1931 at the Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam, terminating a run of over a thousand operatic stage performances.

Dubbed from Edison DD 3602



Jacques Urlus
(1867-1935)
Tenor

Acknowledgements

The author is greatly indebted to the following people:

Eric Lange

Versailles, France
Formerly of Lobster Films

For Provision of:

- Two film/disk clips
- Information from many rare early cylinder catalogues

Agnes Brejzek

Homebush, NSW 2140

For:

- Checking the German text entries (Edison cylinders) for accuracy

Esteban Insausti

Homebush, NSW 2140

For:

- Suggesting the topic as the basis for a presentation to the Wagner Society NSW

To hear many of these early recordings:

UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive
UCSB Discography of American Historical Recordings