

John Earl  
Theatre Conservation Consultant  
Balcaskie Road  
Eltham  
SE9 1HQ

I wish to comment on the terms of protection of sound recordings, from the viewpoint of an entertainment historian, a collector (in a small way, but of some 55 years standing) of early recordings and a regular purchaser of modern reissues of such recordings.

Any proposal to extend the term of copyright protection for sound recordings would damage the interests of consumers of early music hall, musical comedy, ragtime, jazz and blues recordings without benefiting the original artists or encouraging the creation of new artistic material.

The output of the original recording companies, particularly in the period from 1910 to 1940, was and is vital to both historical understanding and artistic appreciation of these entertainment forms and, in the case of music hall and musical comedy, an essential part of the social history of Britain.

None of this would need saying if the behaviour of the modern companies had shown any sign of public spiritedness. In fact, their record has been deplorable. A succession of company acquisitions over a period of a century have put the catalogues of many early companies into the hands of a few. Enormous numbers of recordings which the few might claim to 'own', now exist only as vulnerable copies, sometimes unique copies, in private collections. A vast amount of material from the original studios has been discarded and the material that is still held is unlikely to be reissued by companies interested only in bulk sales. It would be scandalous if an extension of the copyright period enabled them to charge for the reissue by others of some thousands of sound recordings that they themselves have utterly neglected.

The kind of material here referred to is at present made available to a small but significant minority of interested people and, at least as importantly, to entertainment historians, by the activities of a number of individuals and tiny specialist companies that work on a very low profit or no profit at all. It would be wholly against the public interest and serve only the greed of the big companies if such enterprises were to be effectively run out of business by copyright charges.

I wish also to comment on two general matters:

- (i) The heading 'designated archive status' occurs in your cover sheet but not in the issues paper itself (at least, not in its own paragraph). Will you reissue the paper to repair this omission and extend the time for comments?
- (ii) The issues paper seems greatly focused on the interests of the holders of intellectual property rights, with little mention of the public interest in these matters.

John Earl