

Dear Sir

Re: Proposed Extension of Copyright on Sound Recordings

I wish to register my strongest objection to the proposed copyright extension on sound recordings. If this were done retrospectively, and the extension from 50 to 95 years, I believe it would severely jeopardise not only the accessibility but the *preservation* of many important recordings (only ever issued in Britain) from the first half of the twentieth century - broadly speaking, the era of 78 rpm records. I am concerned not so much with the classical field, which is fairly well covered in both preservation of originals and reissues due to the international commercial value of many of the recordings, but with the more ephemeral popular music of the 1910-50 period, especially those of British music hall artists.

During the last few years, advances in domestic digital technology have enabled a legitimate cottage industry to evolve which has done much valuable work in preserving and making available recordings of music hall artists from this period. The companies who originally owned these recordings have no interest in reissuing them, proved by their complete neglect of them during the entire Compact Disc era and indeed the fact that they destroyed or sold off most of their masters and copies years ago. Some of these records are now so rare that there are only one or two known copies in the hands of private collectors who are, however, usually willing to loan them for copying onto CD. This is how a CD devoted to Marie Lloyd – the most famous of all music hall singers, though she made precious few discs – was produced some years ago... and it was done by a small specialist company, *not* the original owner (EMI) of the recordings.

The people who run these small labels usually do it as a labour of love – and it is a great deal of labour, since early recordings require much effort and skill in selecting the correct stylus, playback speed (rarely ‘78’), degree of surface noise removal, etc. This is a further reason why the major record companies have no interest in releasing records from this era: it takes too much time and money for little or no commercial reward.

The historic and cultural value of these recordings is, however, inestimable. The songs they preserve often comment directly on events and attitudes of their time, while the performers reveal styles of delivery that so-called music hall revivals of today never approach. Eventually, a much wider audience may appreciate this – and regret that more was not preserved. Even the companies who made the recordings may be grateful for what was preserved, just as the BBC now relies on collectors for tapes of classical concerts that they deliberately erased from their own archives, or of television shows that they thought had no artistic or commercial value.

All this may seem far removed from the issues on your remit but I urge you to consider very carefully the side-effects of any recommendations you make.

My own recommendation is that only recordings made *after 1950* should be controlled by copyright. This would then cover the entire period of what most people consider acceptable modern sound, where recordings were originated on tape and (from the mid-1950s) in stereo. Only these recordings have any significant commercial value to the major companies and to the living artists (or their relatives)

who made them. Please leave the recordings from the first half of the twentieth century in the public domain, where those of us who love them can be allowed to preserve them and make them available to listeners of today and the future.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Sanders