

Dear Mr Gowers,

I am deeply concerned over the proposed extension of mechanical copyright to

95 years, this change to operate retrospectively. It is clear that the proposal is aimed mainly at protecting the interests of big modern companies for longer than at present. Unfortunately, a side effect would be that the only companies allowed to reissue discs of the past 95 years [ie. after 1910] would be those that recorded them.

The old Edison Bell and Winner label is now owned by Polygram. The HMV, Zonophone, Columbus and Regal labels belong to EMI.

My interest is in 78rpm records and cylinders of music-hall entertainers. Polygram has issued no music-hall material for more than 30 years. In fact, it does not even possess copies of the pre-1948 recordings that they control. Most Edison Bell and Winner records are in the hands of private collectors. Similarly, EMI has made no music-hall reissues for more than 30 years. It does have an archive of many of its HMV records, but it has not kept any of its cheap label Zonophone records, which featured most of its music hall artistes. So, it is extremely doubtful that these major companies would now even consider issuing minority-interest CDs.

At the moment, there are at least four collectors who run their own CD labels, digitally re-mastering these old recordings so that other enthusiasts can enjoy them in superb quality. For these collectors, it is largely a labour of love. They occasionally make small profits. More often than not, they break even. Sometimes, they make a loss. But the work they do is important. Apart from letting music hall fans enjoy listening to records from the past, there is a more serious side. The subjects chosen for songs and the style of language that was used are important tools to understanding the social history of the period. If the 95-year rule were introduced, all this work would stop. And, of course, it would affect not just music hall, but old recordings of classical music, opera, jazz, blues and other genres.

These reissues should be allowed to continue for the benefit of future generations.

Richard Anthony Baker