

45rpm Phono Gazette

Retired RCA engineer meets phonofolks at vintage 'Record Collector' store in NJ



Left to right, Nick Domenico, Al Pollack, and Phil Vourtsis

By Phil Vourtsis

What a great opportunity to talk with someone who actually worked in an RCA Victor plant determining the best mixture of the vinyl mix to make the new 45 rpm records. Al Pollack is a Chemical Engineer who worked in RCA's Indianapolis Plant from 1950 to 1955. The plant was 100,000 square feet and took up a complete city block. When Al joined the RCA team he was the Chief Record Compound Engineer. In 1950 they were still making colored records. Al describes it this way, "The vinyl supplier was B. F. Goodrich. The compound would arrive in railroad cars. They would run a color (like red) for a week and then clean out the machines. The compound would be heated to 500 degrees fahrenheit and dropped into a colander. Once the proper thickness was obtained (this was critical to the process) the mix was chopped into biscuits. Each biscuit would be stamped into one record. Colored vinyl required a special thickening agent to achieve higher viscosity. Black records could use a cheaper thickening agent (calcium Carbonate). This is one of the reasons RCA eventually went to all black records staying with one color also meant no assembly line stops for the color changes." Al is now retired and living in Levittown, PA. (continued on page 3)



Left to right, Nick Domenico, John Tyminski, John Chrambanis, and RCA engineer Al Pollack

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Howard H. Scott, a Developer of the LP, dies at 92

By BEN SISARIO
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The New York Times

Howard H. Scott, who was part of the team at Columbia Records that introduced the long-playing vinyl record in 1948 before going on to produce albums with the New York Philharmonic, Glenn Gould, Isaac Stern and many other giants of classical music, died on Sept. 22 in Reading, Pa. He was 92.

The cause was cancer, said his daughter, Andrea K. Scott. In 1946, Mr. Scott was 26 and just discharged from the Army when he got a job at Columbia Masterworks, the label's classical division. He was soon assigned to Columbia's top-secret project: developing a long-playing record to replace the 78 r.p.m. disc, which could hold only about four minutes of music on each brittle shellac side.

The project had begun in 1940 and was nearing completion. But its engineers needed someone with musical training — particularly the ability to read orchestral scores — to help transfer recordings from 78s to the new discs, which played at 33 1/3 r.p.m., could hold about 22 minutes a side and were made of more durable vinyl.

Howard Hillison Scott fit the bill. Born in Bridgeport, Conn., on May 31, 1920, he graduated from the Eastman School of Music in 1941 and had just begun graduate piano studies at Juilliard when he was drafted the next year. Back in civilian life in July 1946, he was hired by Columbia as a trainee. In the days before magnetic tape came into wide use, the process of transferring music to the new discs (soon to be known as LPs) was complex. Long pieces of music, split among multiple 78 r.p.m. records, needed to be stitched together on the new discs without interruption.

To do that, Mr. Scott and his colleagues lined up overlapping segments of music on 78s, and — with Mr. Scott snapping his finger in coordination — switched the audio signal at just the right moment from one turntable to the other. As the industry began to use magnetic tape, beginning in the late 1940s, such work was no longer necessary.

As a staff producer at Columbia, Mr. Scott worked on hundreds of recordings by most of the major orchestras of the United States, including those of Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Cincinnati in addition to the New York Philharmonic. He had a particularly close association with Gould, beginning with his historic recording of Bach's "Goldberg" Variations in 1955.

Mr. Scott left Columbia in 1961 and worked at MGM Records, RCA Red Seal, the publisher G. Schirmer and the Rochester

Philharmonic, where he was executive manager in the 1970s. He won a 1966 Grammy Award as the producer of the classical album of the year: Charles Ives's Symphony No. 1, performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Morton Gould conducting, on RCA Red Seal.

From 1986 until his retirement in 1993, Mr. Scott worked for Sony, Columbia's corporate successor, as a producer, once again transferring old albums to a new format: the CD.

In addition to his daughter, Mr. Scott is survived by a son, Jon; two sisters, Carol Ruth Shepherd and Elaine Silver; and two granddaughters.

In a 1998 interview with The New York Times, on the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the LP, Mr. Scott remarked about the durability of the format, and took note of a small renaissance taking root at the time.

"They lived from 1948 to 1978, when the CD came in," he said. "Now they're coming back. Small companies are issuing them. I'm still an LP fan."



Last issue I mentioned a Truetone portable player in nice physical shape went for \$430 on Ebay. Obviously if you looked at the picture you see that it is a Phono Art machine. Sorry for the confusion.

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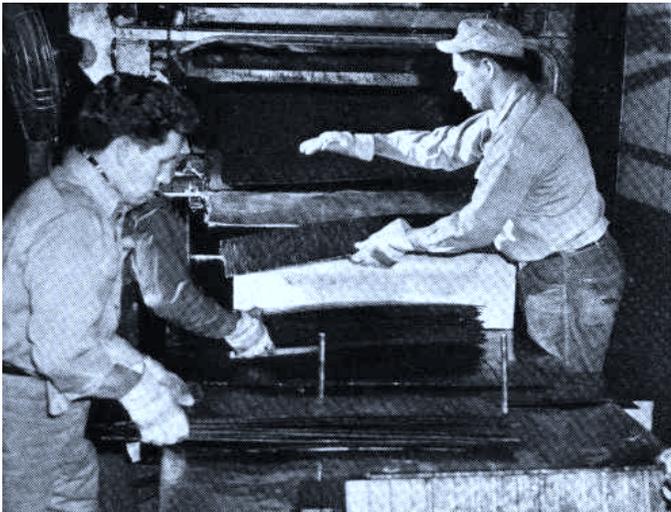
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Luckily I have some great pictures of the Indianapolis plant when RCA Victor was manufacturing 45s. The first shot shows workers thinning the compound to the required thickness. The second shot shows how the 45 rpm record complete with labels is removed from one of the powerful presses at Indianapolis plant. Shot three shows how excess material is stripped from the outer rim. Shot four shows semi-automatic

machines punching out the large center hole at a rate of 30 disks per minute. Many thanks to Al for sharing his experiences with us.

Joining Al Pollack and I were phono-lovers Nick Domenico and John Tyminski, and store owner John Chrambanis. The store is located in Bordentown, NJ and is really worth the trip. There are thousands of vinyl records for sale. John T showed me the 'back room' where there was the biggest assortment of 45s I have ever seen in one room. They had not be cataloged yet. The place is so big, they have live groups performing regularly. Check out the webpage at www.The-Record-Collector.com. There are hardly any record stores left so this place is a real treat.



Want List

The 45rpm Phono Gazette

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