

# Na počátku ne(byl) Edison.

Průkopníci záznamů a reprodukce zvuku ve světě a  
českých zemích: Od voskového fonoválečku k vinylové  
desce

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# 1891–1914

## The sound industry in Bohemia and Moravia

The first time citizens of Czech lands were able to get acquainted with Edison's phonograph and phonograph cylinders was in 1891 at the Provincial Jubilee Exhibition in Prague. The demonstration was held at the stand of the Berlin representatives of Edison's company, which was adorned with an American flag.

# 1891 Provincial Jubilee Exhibition in Prague



# Imperial and royal phonograph cylinders and records

By the end of the nineteenth century, a number of companies, mostly from large cities, began importing phonographs and phonograph cylinders to the Czech lands.

In Prague, these included the company:

- imperial and royal court optician and mechanic **A. Rosenthal** (Na příkopech Street),
- the wholesale store of **Josef Vrba** (Poříč 6),
- **Max C. Steiner's** company (Poříč 25),
- the factory musical instrument warehouse of **Vilém Hoffmann** (Královské Vinohrady),
- **J. Pöschl** at address Karlín, (Královská 55),
- imperial and royal court purveyor **Otto Fischl** (Celetná Street 24),
- and **Wilhelm Klein** (Hybernská Street 7).



# 1900 Emile Berliner's Gramophone

The Czech language was first heard on commercially published gramophone records in 1900.

The operatic tenor František Pácal, at that time performing with the Vienna Court Opera, and choirmaster and composer Jaromír Herle, engaged there as well, recorded a total of 14 Czech opera arias and national songs on single-sided gramophone records for E. Berliner's Gramophone company in May of that year.

Together with ten more recordings by František Pácal from early 1901, these are not only the oldest, but also the only recordings of Czech artists made on gramophone records by gramophone inventor Emile Berliner.



E. BERLINER'S GRAMOPHONE  
Single-sided records, 17 cm,  
1900–1901 (recordings in Czech)  
*These shellac discs recorded in Vienna  
present historically the very first  
recordings of Czech singers.*

# 1902 Columbia/Graphophone

The American Columbia company maintained strong representation in Europe, originally through its phonograph cylinders, and, since the beginning of the century, also through its gramophone records.

In 1902, Vienna-based company R. E. Thallmayer took over the regional representation of the company in Bohemia and in the Balkan countries. The Czech repertoire was published by businessman and representative of the Berlin branch of the parent company, Josef Pacovský, from about 1902.

Recordings were issued on single-sided gramophone records with the labels Columbia Disc Record and Columbia Phonograph Co., and since 1906, on double-sided gramophone records with the label Columbia Graphophone Record.



COLUMBIA DISC RECORD

Single-sided, 25 cm, 1902

*The oldest version of a Columbia disc with a recording by the Czech artist. Violine virtuoso Jaroslav Kocian recorded mere three sides for this company*

# 1902 The Gramophone Company Ltd.

The Czech catalogue of The Gramophone Co. was filled with recordings made by technicians of the parent company during their frequent working visits in Prague (and in 1908, also in Vienna and Brno).

The last gramophone recordings for this company were made in July 1914, just before the beginning of World War I. Out of hundreds of recordings with Czech artists made from 1902 to 1914, a discography of 99% of the recordings has been captured.

The list includes all the best Czech opera singers of the era that were persuaded to perform on gramophone records.



CONCERT RECORD "GRAMOPHONE"

Matrices *Victor*, 25 cm, cca 1921

Reissue of this recording, originally made in New York, was in Usti/Aussig pressing plant released on label of this design

# 1905 Favorite Record

Since 1905, likely the most extensive and best programme was conducted by the German Favorite label, thanks to its Vienna branch managed by Hartkopp & Fischer.

In addition to the recordings of important opera singers such as František Pácal, which are relatively rare today, opera baritone and collector of sound recordings Štěpán Chodounský made several recordings on test gramophone records for this brand.

Of the other exceptional acts, worth mentioning is a recording from 1910 (published on a special label with patriotically toned colors, on which Senator Václav Klofáč presents a rousing speech entitled "For national and social justice".



## FAVORITE RECORD

Matrices *Favorite*, 25 cm, 1909

Partiotically tinted label was chosen for recording of the Czech national anthem backed by the speech of senator Vaclav Klofáč, later on one of the founders of Czechoslovak Republic.

# 1906 Pathé

Czech repertoire on Pathé brand gramophone records can be traced back to 1906, and publication of discs with diameters of 24 cm and 29.5 cm was relatively extensive. In the beginning, Pathé issued Viennese pressings of transcriptions from cylinders recorded since 1904 with Czech artists who were active on Vienna's theatre and opera stages.

Later – until 1914 – a Viennese technician made new recordings in a studio in Prague's district of Smíchov near the Anděl locality.

Although the number of Czech records pressed on Pathé brand gramophone records was relatively high, today it is difficult to determine the circumstances under which they were recorded.



PATHE

Matrices *Pathe Freres*, 24, 29 and 35 cm,  
1906–1911

All records of this label produced before the WWI started at centre of the record and the recommended speed of their playback was 90-100 rpm.

# 1908 Hermann Maassen Record Werke

Since 1908, domestic entrepreneurs joined the competition for a place in the sun by introducing their own cheap labels, pressed to order by these entrepreneurs – in fact, often pirates – who had the materials and the necessary machinery available.

A champion in these activities was the aforementioned Hermann Maassen, whose factory supplied the Czech market with cheap gramophone records pressed from the renumbered matrices of various record companies until the middle of the 1930s, including the years 1914–1918.

The repertoire of recordings on these gramophone records was exclusively folksy – recordings of brass orchestras, cabaret songs and comic scenes of meagre quality prevailed.



METAFON-RECORD  
Matrices *Homophon/Hermann Maassen*,  
25 cm, 1913  
The made-to-order label of *Metallwaren  
Fabriks* of Budapest pressed in Bohemia  
by Hermann Maassen using the  
*Homophon* matrices.

# 1908 Odeon/International Talking Machine Company

A wide Czech repertoire was also published by the Vienna branch of the International Talking Machine Co. on Odeon brand gramophone records. Until 1911, these had atypical diameters of 19 and 27 cm.

Odeons were the first double-sided gramophone records in the world – the parent company had first presented them to the public at the spring grand fair in Leipzig in 1904.

The first recordings of Czech artists were made in Vienna during the fall of that year, and their number reached almost two thousand by 1910.



ODEON RECORD

Matrices *ITMC/Odeon*, 27 cm, 1908

This record was issued in celebration of the Kaiser Franz Josef's 50th Jubilee year as reigning monarch of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the gold and black colour combination being that of the Hapsburg monarchy.

# 1909 Koncertní desky Lucerna



## KONCERTNI DESKY LUCERNA

Matrices *Kalliope* and *Beka*, 25 cm, 1909–1912

“H & V Praha” refers to the *Hlad & Vlas* company, which had its store in the newly build large *Lucerna* (Lantern) palais in the city centre, the very first concrete/iron building in Prague. This palais was built by grandfather of former Czech President Vaclav Havel.



# 1909 DIEGO FUCHS PATRIA-RECORD /PATRIA REKORD



PATRIA-RECORD/PATRIA REKORD

Matrices *Kalliope Gesselschaft m. b. H.* and others,  
25 cm, cca 1909-1911

One of the pioneers of the Czech recording industry, Mr. Diego Fuchs ("fuchs" translates as "fox" in German) used different variations of labels for his pirate pressings. For his pairing of a fox and gramophone, which bore comparison to the well known painting of Nipper, Mr. Fuchs was repeatedly sued by the GC, the legal costs eventually forcing him into bankruptcy.



# 1909 DIEGO FUCHS FOX-RECORD



This label a  
DGG su



FOX-RECORD

1 and Kalliope, 25 cm, 1913

Diego Fuchs had to stop production of his *Patria* labels when  
his dog logo, too similar to the well-known "Nipper" image.

# 1910 Čechie brand

The last chapter of original phonograph cylinder production in the Czech lands saw the founding of the Čechie. Čechie cylinders were advertised as the “first factory producing gold cast cylinders in Prague”, and the company was announced by its owner, Karel Šternvald, in the daily press for the first time on 12. January 1910.

Although Čechie began its production via the recordings of Robert Polák (later the director of National Theatre in Prague), its subsequent Czech program was not particularly interesting or unique.



# 1918–1946: The sound industry in Czechoslovakia

Although the creation of the new independent state in the economic and political spheres was slow and difficult, the entertainment industry enjoyed a golden era in the years immediately after 1918.

Many entertainment venues and political cabarets saw an upsurge of enthusiastic interest from audiences. These venues at first rode the wave of themes a lá “how we demolished Austria” but their protagonists quickly began to castigate the shortcomings of the new state establishment.



# 1921 Maraton / Maraton Rekord



## MARATON /MARATON REKORD

Matrices *Homokord*, 25 cm, 1921–1927

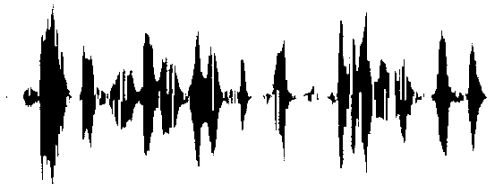
These records were distributed by wholesalers *Antonin & Arnošt Fučík Co.* of Prague, who obtained their matrices from *Homokord*. The “Maraton orchestra” is in fact one of many manifestations of the notorious brass band led by Arnošt Herman; his band made about 5000 recordings (!) between 1902 and 1930, for practically all labels with the Czech repertoire.

# 1930-1947 ESTA

The history of the first Czechoslovak record company, Esta, and the discography of its Czech recordings were recently examined in detail.

Czech catalogue of recordings of gramophone company Esta 1930–1946. Electronic version:  
<https://archive.org/details/ceskykatalognahravekgramofonove>

Let us therefore just briefly mention some milestones in the development of these record companies.



Matrices *Esta*, 25 cm, 1930–1931  
Another colour variations of the *Esta* labels. Its first recordings from own matrices begun this first Czechoslovak gramophone company to press on shellac records in autumn of 1930.

# 1932-1933 ESTA ČOS/MACCABI



ESTA ČOS

Matrices *Esta*, 25 cm, 1931–1932

Custom-made label used on the records produced on behalf

of the Czech gymnastic organization *Sokol* for its rally, which took place in Prague in 1932.



ESTA MACCABI

Matrices *Esta*, 25 cm, 1933

This custom label was made for a gymnastic festival, the

Maccabiah Games (sometimes referred to as the Jewish Olympics), the first of which was held in 1932 and which are still being held.



# 1932-1939 RADIOJOURNAL 1946-1947 ČESKOSLOVENSKÝ ROZHLAS



## RADIOJOURNAL PRAHA

Non-commercial recordings. Matrices *Ultraphon*,  
25 and 30 cm, 1932–1939

Records with these labels were made by the  
*Ultraphon* on behalf of Czechoslovak Radio  
(*Radiojournal*). Until 1938, about 500 recordings  
were made, intended for use in the radio  
broadcasting only.

## ČESKOSLOVENSKÝ ROZHLAS

Non-commercial recordings, *Decelith* foil,  
25 and 30 cm, 1946

The building featured on this label housed technical  
background of Czechoslovak Radio and until May of  
1945 also served for broadcasting of the German  
branch of Czechoslovak Radio.

# 1932 SYSTEM DR. RADWAN

The largest and oldest Prague-based professional grand factory of the radio-gramophone industry of Jan Kettner also contributed to the category of curiosities.

In the spring of 1932, its owner had recorded two gramophone records in Berlin which reportedly should have been an ideal aid for those who wished – as the brochure inserted in the set claimed – “to again control themselves and their organisms, achieve life ideals, health, work efficiency and joy from life...”

All this and much more was to have been ensured for potential customers via suggestive gramophone records narrated according to the system of a certain Dr. Radwan by a subject put into a deep hypnotic sleep by the doctor. Dr. Radwan called his method **psychophony**.



SYSTEM DR. RADWAN  
Matrices *Odeon*, 25 cm, 1932  
Made-on-order label produced for the  
wholesaler *Jan Kettner Co.* of Prague.  
These very strange “psychophonic”  
records were recorded in Berlin and  
pressed both in the Czech and German  
language.

# 1929-1947 ULTRAPHON

The first Ultraphon gramophone records with a Czech and Slovak repertoire appeared on the domestic market thanks to Prague distribution company Ravitas at the end of 1929.

They were recorded in the Berlin recording studio of parent company Deutsche Ultraphon Aktiengesellschaft, and German technicians later arrived in Prague with recording equipment.

The Ravitas company at first also distributed numerous recordings originally made for the German catalogue, and it also took over the distribution of the Musica Sacra and Orchestrola labels.

In 1931-1935, it introduced cheap sub-labels Artona, Selektion and, for a short time, also Ultraphonet.



## ULTRAPHON

Matrices *Deutsche Ultraphon AG*,  
25 and 30 cm, 1929–1932

Label of records with the very first  
recordings for Czechoslovakia, still with  
address of the original owner of this  
company, the *N. V. Kuchenmeister's  
Internationale Ultraphoon Maatschappij  
Amsterdam – Berlin.*

# 1938 ULTRAPHON



ULTRAPHON

*Ultraphon, 30 cm, 1938*

Recording of political speech. President Beneš resigned his presidency a few weeks before the date of here proclaimed "20 years of Czechoslovakia" was reached. Resigning on October 5, he immediately went into exile in the West and new label had to be used for his speech.



**Czech  
Specials**

# 1909 DESKY-MOZART

## 1950 MEZINARODNI DISKOTEKA



### DESKY-MOZART

Matrices *Lyrophon*, 25 cm, 1909

The company of one Josef Kukla in Prague boasted that its new records, *Desky Mozart*, were twice as durable as records issued by any other manufacturer. In fact, Mr. Kukla merely used matrices from *Lyrophon* which were already on sale and covered their labels with his own stickers.

### MEZINARODNI DISKOTEKA

Matrices GC/Victor, 25 and 30 cm, cca 1950

This “International Discoteque of Music Theatre” label was pressed by Supraphon, mostly from the in 1945 by communists nationalized matrices of Gramophone Company. Records were distributed to schools and cultural institutions. The scope of this edition and exact dates of its publishing are not known.

# 1906 FENDRYCHOVA OZVUČKA DVOŘÁK



# 1912 VLASTA RECORD



## FENDRYCHOVA OZVUČKA DVOŘÁK

Matrices *Globos*, 25 cm, 1906

No record exists of a publisher by the name of Fendrych and his tuning fork (ozvučka). The name of the tune “Sousedovic hrušky” (Neighbour’s pears) is based on the German original, “Kirschen in Nachbars Garten” (which means *cherries*, not pears!).

## VLASTA RECORD

Matrices *Homophon Co.*, 25 cm, cca 1912

A large community of Czech and Moravian protestant immigrants made in Berlin an influential segment of the ethnic neighbourhood called *Neukölln*. Running across the upper segment, this special label reads “Record of Czech Expatriates”.

# 1930 UNIVERSAL PICTURES CORP.



UNIVERSAL PICTURES CORP.  
Matrices *Columbia Phonograph*  
Co., 40 cm, 1930

These records containing the  
soundtrack of talkies, or better to  
say “overdubbing” of the original  
sounds, were played at 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm  
on the special turntables in the  
movie theatres equipped with  
projectors for the silent movies  
only.

