

It Happened in Montevideo

A look at a hoard of rolls from Uruguay

As all collectors know, from time to time something crops up that is quite unexpected and different from anything you've seen before. This is certainly the case with a collection of rolls recently imported into the UK from Montevideo in Uruguay, a saga that took a good three years.

Earlier articles looking at South America have shown it was a market where pretty well anything was imported, so the majority of rolls are from familiar American, British and German companies. Most are 88-note but with plenty of Artrio-Angelus reproducing rolls, as well as Recordo and QRS Automatic expression rolls – the latter offering more basic expression than reproducing pianos, a type of instrument rarely seen in the UK. The mixture of music, and the condition of the rolls, suggests that the collection is based around the remaining stock from a closed shop. Maybe this was the importer, and piano dealership, Vittone Hnos (Brothers) whose name appears on some box-top labels.

So, what was unexpected? It was the final block of rolls made locally in Montevideo. They are on two different labels, the majority on Victor and a few on GH, the initials of their maker, Gioscia Hnos.



Now, anybody with the slightest interest in old records or gramophones will immediately be asking whether this Victor is the famous gramophone maker, or if the name is just a coincidence. The seller actually referred to them as “RCA Victor”, which seemed so far-fetched that it was dismissed (RCA came into the frame very late in the roll-making era). However, the rolls do indeed carry the famous “His Master’s Voice” logo, so there was clearly a link somewhere. The mystery was easy to solve, thanks to the internet: the rolls have box-top labels that show they were made by “Morixe & Cia” or “Dellazoppa & Morixe” (the given name varies). They were long-established and well-known agents for Victor records and gramophones in Montevideo. They supplemented the available imported material with locally-made products, which they obtained by sending local artists to Buenos Aires a couple of hundred miles away on the other side of the Rio de la Plata (a steamship did the journey each night). With enterprise like that, making rolls must have seemed logical, and they clearly felt it appropriate to use the trademark on these rolls – an interesting approach that I’m not aware of any other roll maker using. Perhaps they were truly the only Victor / HMV agency that became involved with rolls?



Gioscia may have been a smaller maker of rolls, to judge by this collection, but a bit of delving shows that as a business they were – and are – markedly successful. They were founded in 1919 at 816 Calle San José where they could display one piano, soon moving up the street to number 836, and in 1928 moving to a grander street altogether, Avenida 18 de Julio, eventually adopting the name Palacio de la Musica – by which name you can find their present-day website proudly saying “today as in 1919”, although it fails to mention their original name.

Exija siempre
la famosa marca de
fábrica “La Voz del Amo”,
que aparece en cada Disco
Victor, y en cada Máquina
Victor y Victrola

Oiga los espléndidos discos VÍCTOR de tangos, vales, estilos, etc., de FIRPO, FERRER, PACHO y otros, por orquesta típica de bandoneón, piano, violín y flauta. La VÍCTOR es la primera casa que pone en venta las composiciones de los mejores autores Argentinos y Uruguayos.

SE REMITEN CATÁLOGOS GRATIS

Agencia exclusiva y Depósito General de la Cía. Victor

DELLAZOPPA & MORIXE

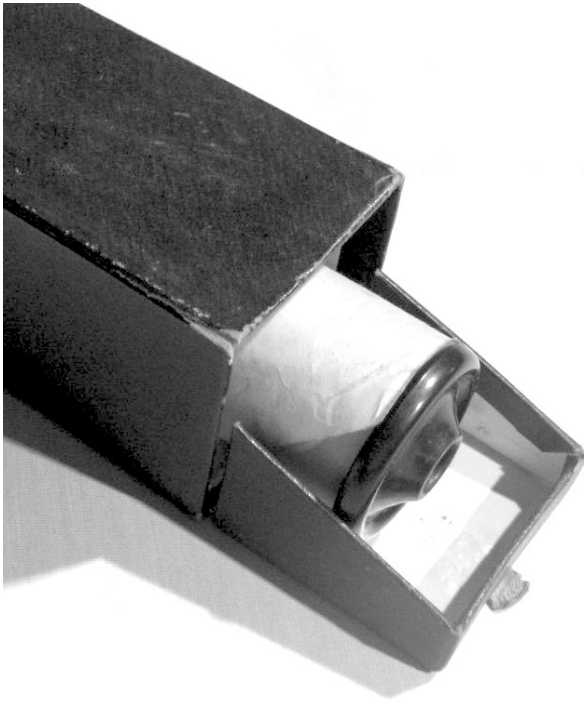
Plaza INDEPENDENCIA, 733

Sucursal: **SARANDI, 614**

— Montevideo —

Quien no miente no viene de buena gente

They are still a major instrument and record producer with many branches, and (a few years ago at least) were still headed by the Gioscia family.



Of these locally-made rolls, the majority are standard repertoire. It's hard to determine whether they were from new masters or copied from imported rolls: the technical standard of manufacture is pretty low, and even rolls that are obviously local are as rough as copies. The local rolls are mostly 88-note, but a fair number carry some form of dynamic coding, presumably Recordo. The Victor and GH rolls are arranged and made quite differently, not just different names for the same thing. GH used a most unusual box with an end flap, which haven't lasted well.

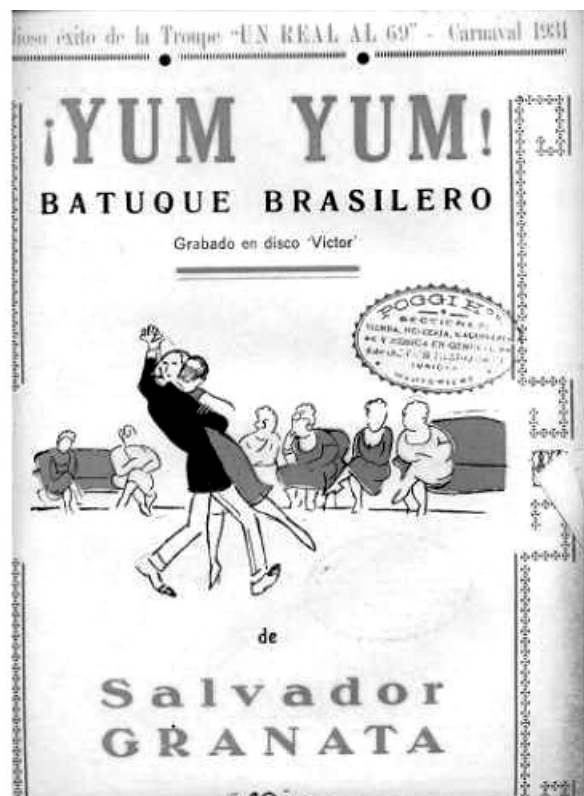
The most distinct part of this collection is the fairly small number of popular music titles, which are dominated by local material. Seeing that the number is so few, I've listed them in full below:

GH

- A128 Polola Mia (Zamba) Cesar O Sachi
- A313 Ya ya me diga (Maxixe) Moraes
- A334 Seu Patrio (Maxixe) S Granata
- A339 Por el camino (Tango) Joseph Bóhr
- A465 Valencia (Cancion de Espana) Padilla

Victor

- 32697 Los ojazoe de mi negra (Zamba) R Aviles
- 32818 Que importa la lluvia (Fox Trot) Miller y Cohn
- 32842 El Chana (Maxixe) S Granata
- 32854 Vai Vai Vai (Maxixe) F Junior
- 32971 Monerías (Maxixe) S Granata
- 32921 Hopa Hopa (Fox Trot) O Romanelli
- 33007 Ahora que va (Maxixe) Granata
- 33056 Mi parjarito verde (Maxixe) Granata
- 33128 Besos de miel (Maxixe) Romanelli
- 33140 Pajarito Cantor (Zamba) R Collazo
- 33168 Ay negrita quiero más (Maxixe) N Guiffuni
- 33370 Cascarita (Maxixa) R Courau
- 33372 Yum Yum (Batuque Brasileiro) S Granata
- 33377 Casariola (Maxixa) O Romanelli
- 33383 El Manisero (Rumba) M Simons



43026 Claveles Mendocinos (Zamba) A Pelaia
 43046 Gitana de los ojos moros (Paso Doble) S Granata
 43082 Mi caballo jerezano (Paso Doble) A G del Barrio
 43246 Amor Amor (Maxixa) R O Viera
 43266 Reine Andaluza (Paso Doble) L D Agostino
 52243 Aragonesa (Jota) Cinna

The musical pattern in these titles is compromised by having had its Tangos removed, because the Uruguayan government consider these to be national heritage and wouldn't permit their export: there has been a long-running battle between Argentina and Uruguay about which of them originated the tango, so it's a sensitive issue. One in the wrong box escaped! That leaves us with a dominance of South-American dance styles: Maxixes (similar to the Tango, but originating from Rio de Janeiro in Brazil), Zambas (a stately Argentinian triple-beat form, not related to the Samba), a Batuque Brasileiro (the Batuque originating from the Cape Verde islands off western Africa), plus a clutch of Spanish styles in the form of Paso Dobles, a Jota and a 'song of Spain' that's really the worldwide hit "Valencia" – incidently, the only one of this collection that comes with words, in the form of a typed sheet. Only two Fox-Trots, one a local composition by Orlando Romanelli that doesn't sound remotely like a Fox-Trot, the other "Que importa la lluvia" being the American tune "Don't mind the rain" of 1924. El Manisero is the yet-to-be-famous Peanut Vendor, a Cuban composition.



One thing that is striking about this list is the number of times that Salvador Granata's name appears, both on Victor and GH. He was obviously a local 'name'. Searching for him on the internet gives an interesting idea about the context for many of these rolls, which is the Montevideo Carnival.

The carnival was a major source of new music, which would be composed for the various troupes who competed against each other year after year. Granata was founder (in 1925) and leader of "Los Real al 69" for many years. The music written for a troupe was theirs, and would be firmly associated with them by all the locals, reinforced by records and piano rolls – Granata's compositions were

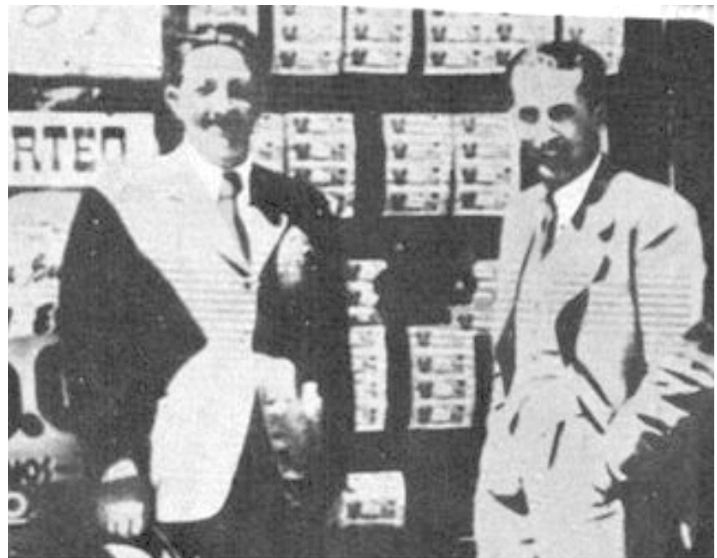
recorded on Victor records as well as on roll. The sheet music for “Yum Yum” gives the whole story, with the 1931 carnival and Real 69's Victor disc. A little delving shows that other pieces in this list are associated with other troupes. Ramon “El Loro” Collazo (1901-1981) lead the “Oxford” troupe, which he founded in 1927. A friend of Granata’s originally, this caused a falling-out that lasted many years (not helped by the fact that Oxford matched and then beat



Real al 69). Orlando Romanelli was sometimes Granata’s lyricist, and led an orchestra of his own which was still playing in the 1970s. No doubt more research of the carnival would unearth further connections.

Loro (to the left) and Salvador Granata (to the right of the photo) are shown below. An idea of the way the carnival worked and some of the personalities associated with, as well as the place that Dellazoppa & Morixe played in it, it can be seen in the following extract:

“The rivalry between the two troupes was began in December 1926, before “Oxford” climbed on a stage. Salvador Granata, who was famous for "Un real", and Ramón Collazo, who was in the Athenian troupe and the Athens, would meet as composers in the halls of the Morixe house, which distributed Victor discs. Salvador asked Loro if it was true that he was leading a troupe in the next carnival. “Yes, it’s true,” Granata heard the news. Friends as they were, that was enough to stop them talking for fifteen years. The traditional rivalry between the two was fuelled, in part, by the ridicule that extended afterwards



from each stage. In 1942 Edmundo Bianchi (a career diplomat) reconciled them in time for Salvador Granata, a little later, to die in the arms of his friend.” [from Hugo Alfaro “*Mi mundo tal cual es (My world as it is)*,” *Ediciones de la Banda Oriental*]



As a closing aside, Montevideo produced “La Cumparsita”, the most famous tango of the lot. It was written and published in 1916, originally in support of a students’ march, appearing the next year in Buenos Aires and almost everywhere else soon after. Although it’s not to be found in this particular collection, a collector in Argentina [it was Julian Zabaloy! – see page 11] has recently made available scans of no less than three different arrangements of it on the

Pampa roll label! There is some dispute about who first recorded La Cumparsita, but the strongest claim seems to be Roberto Firpo’s orchestra recording for Victor, so it sort-of fits here.

It’s been fascinating delving around for this article. The intensely specific local interest makes this a very unusual collection: these titles and composers are not mainstream Tango repertoire, but the Montevideo carnival in the late 1920s. It’s hard to get a grip on something such as this from the UK in 2010, and I hope I’ve not misinterpreted too much!

Julian Dyer

