

# Couple collects classic old-time phonographs

By JUDITH BERNE

The sound of music pervades their lives. As collectors of old phonographs, and the cylinders and discs which were played on them, Bowen and Joy Brook have captured a preliminary interest in music and sound into a hobby, business and theme for their home.

Brook, president of Max Brook Inc. Realtors, had little idea when he answered a classified advertisement for a Victor Talking Machine three years ago that it would be the start of a "disease."

The Brooks had just moved from a "very traditional two-story colonial" in Bloomfield Township to a vintage house on the shores of Orchard Lake. Brook was merely looking for an oak accessory for a glassed-in room added on to the 1896-97 house.

The 1904 model Victor which features a tapered tone arm and plays three songs per windup was soon joined by an Edison cylinder machine.

"We found out it was worth more than we paid for it," Mrs. Brook said. "In our society people have the tendency to want to collect. The monetary end is probably what gets people started."

"It was just like opening a new door," Brook added. "At times I'm up to 1 a.m. researching, calling across the country. It's obsessive. It's almost infantile."

MUSIC HAS ALWAYS played a major part in the Brooks' lives. Both sing and he is a member of the Potpourri Singers, a Birmingham-based group specializing in popular songs.

Daughter Kathy also sings and son Kurt plays piano, trombone and is a member of the West Bloomfield High School group, The Back Pages.

"We all love music," Mrs. Brook said.

"Bo's always been interested in high fidelity."

Their living room hosts a sophisticated stereo system juxtaposed against a grand piano — which is also a player piano — and various antique phonographs. These range from an 1895 Graphophone to a Victor Orthophonic console which takes up a large chunk of space.

But the Brooks aren't adverse to branching out. When a 1914-15 Regina Hexaphone juke box became available, it readily fit into their collecting and furnishing scheme.

Most of the antique phonographs used to decorate their home aren't for sale. But about 30 others and accompanying discs and cylinders are for sale and trade. Their listing: Treasures in Sound.

That business now supports what they buy for themselves, according to Brook.

And, it has been a vehicle to new friendships, for the outgoing couple, particularly through summertime appearances at the Ann Arbor-Saline Road Antiques Market.

There, they have met people who share their interest.

"It's an automatic bond of friendship," Mrs. Brook said. "We have been thrown with people we would never have met in a million years. We've stayed at their houses. They've stayed at ours. It's a trusting kind of relationship."

BROOK APPEARS to enjoy the research and search for the vintage phonographs as much as the actual possession.

"First of all you're learning. Then to come into contact with it, then have a chance to acquire it. There is a sense of history," he said.

"I'm on the track of something right now," he confided. "If I find it . . ."

He happily chronicled a brief history of early phonographs which he said started out with wind-up handles, outside horns

and wax cylinders of recorded music.

As the development of sound progressed, horns went inside, discs gradually replaced wax cylinders and phonograph casings were turned into pieces of furniture.

The Columbia Phonograph Co., manufacturer of his 1895 Graphophone, gave rise to the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), he reported. And the Victor Talking Machine he first bought was the precursor of R.C.A. Victor.

He also enjoyed recapturing the competition between Edison, Columbia and Victor.

Opera star Enrico Caruso "was the cornerstone of the modern recording industry," Brook related. "When Victor signed him in 1904, from that point on Victor just outdistanced everybody."

Victor began with discs — the beginning of the modern record. Then Columbia switched from the cylinder to the disc. But "Edison stayed with the cylinder until he developed the diamond disc in 1912," according to Brook.

The diamond disc, of which Brook has a number, is a quarter-inch thick record.

"That was his surrender," Brook said, with a smile. "But he never gave up completely on the cylinder."

THE BROOKS' COLLECTION will probably take a turn for the smaller since their home cannot hold many more phonographs. For example, a console such as their early Victor A-C radio-phonograph is approximately five by three feet and contains shelves to hold leather-bound volumes of records.

Of necessity and also as his interest has become more educated and refined, Brook is pursuing smaller, more unusual musical antiques.

He is also anticipating sharing his knowledge gained after "three years worth of histrionics."



Joy and Bowen Brook are mainly into collecting old phonographs. But they couldn't resist this vintage juke box, made by Regina Hexaphone about 1914, which no doubt was the center of attention at some ice cream parlor long ago. (Staff photos by John Stano.)

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