

**The indication of rotation speed on the labels of the Soc. Nazionale del  
"Grammofono" records in the ICBSA archives**  
(Massimiliano Lopez)

PART TWO

"78 RPM": "His Master's Voice" recordings are made to be played at a speed of 78 RPM, and no deviation should be made from this rule unless a special speed is marked after the record reference in the catalog. The correct speed determines pitch, tone, and tempo, and only by paying close attention to this point can you ensure that you hear these elements as they actually were while they were being recorded.

Turntables should be tested for speed from time to time. This can be done instantaneously by means of the patented "His Master's Voice" speed tester.

To conclude this brief reflection on a technological aspect of the history of reproduction that should contribute to the correct preservation of historical record collections in the archives, let's quickly return to the analysis of the ICBSA documents from which we started our discussion.

We have noted that the presence or absence of the indication of rotation speed, in the case of the Società Nazionale del "Grammofono", seems to coincide with its two historical phases of life. However, some sporadic testimonies of the first phase seem to be exceptions to the general trend. In only four cases, among the two hundred examined, the record labels have the rotation speed printed on the right side. This anomaly may depend on various factors, the first and most significant of which is the chronological data: it is quite likely that the company, as the Italian subsidiary of the English Gramophone, decided to adopt the typographical changes that occurred after 1922 with the explicit adoption of the 78 rpm standard (change of graphic organization of the label, introduction of the new Series represented by capital letters followed by a number, etc.). Again, the publication of the Historical Catalogue n.2 confirms the need for a new "series" in which the speed data is essential.

The images below belong to both cases described above: the disc "Gramophone" DB 978 containing the Sonata al chiaro di luna performed by Harold Bauer is affected by the new graphic layout of the label that provides the disappearance of the old partitions in the lower part, the introduction of the new serial number (it is still present, although in brackets and on the left, the old editorial number of the English edition: 05938) and the addition of the indication of rotation speed; the disc "Gramophone" DB 129, containing two interpretations of Enrico Caruso, belongs instead to that group of recordings grouped within the Historical Catalogue no. 2 published in 1925, as is clear from the inscription placed in an arc between DISCO "GRAMMOFONO" and the logo: "This disc is included in catalogue no. 2 which contains records of special historical interest not included in the general catalogue".



Although the record belongs to the production of the Società Nazionale del "Grammofono" (1912-early 1927), it bears the indication of the rotation speed, as was customary in the labels of the Società Anonima Nazionale del "Grammofono" (1927-1937). These characteristics make it likely that this record dates from the last five years of production of the SN del "Grammofono". The record is among those suppressed in the catalogue of 1 October 1934.

(ICBSA 259884)



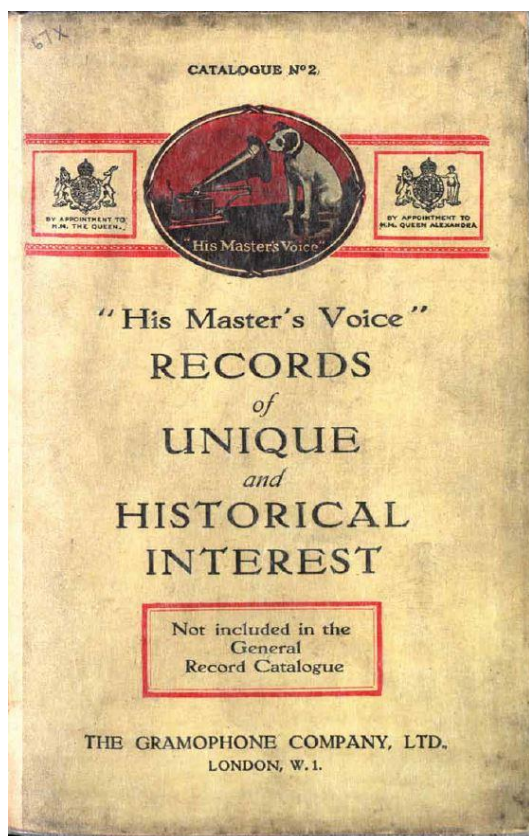
Red label disc of the "National Gramophone Society" DB 129 (side a) belongs to the series of engravings listed in the Historical Catalogue no.2. Therefore, although it belongs to the production of the National Gramophone Company (1912-early 1927), it can be dated between 1925 and early 1927. The speed of rotation at 78 rpm is not due to a standard, but is the original speed adopted in the recording made by Enrico Caruso in 1906 (see Historical Catalogue no. 2).

(ICBSA 7377)

In this last disc it is interesting to note that there is a contradiction between the indications offered on the two sides of the disc and the Historical Catalogue: the side containing the aria Spirto gentil taken from "La Favorita" is consistently reported at 78 rpm both on the label and in the catalogue; the romanza by Francesco Paolo Tosti Ideale is instead recorded, according to the catalogue, at 80 rpm while the label has stamped "Giri 78".



Red label disc from the Soc. Naz. del "Grammofono" DB 129 (side b). The speed of rotation at 78 rpm does not correspond to the original speed of 80 rpm adopted in the recording made by Enrico Caruso in 1906 and reported in the Historical Catalogue (ICBSA 7377)



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	Date Recorded	No.	Size	Label
<b>ENRICO CARUSO—continued.</b>				
Di quella pira (TROVATORE—Verdi) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1910	DA 113	10 Red
Lasciati amar (Leoncavallo) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1913		
Donna e mobile, La (RICCOLETTO—Verdi) <i>In Italian</i>	(82)	1910	DA 561	10 Red
Ora e per sempre addio (OTELLO—Verdi) <i>In Italian</i>	(81)	1910		
Finestra c'è luce e mo' non luce (Neapolitan Song) <i>In Neapolitan</i>	(78)	1913	DB 140	12 Red
Trieste ritorno—Romanza (Barthelémy) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1906		
Ideale (Romanza) (Tosti) <i>In Italian</i>	(80)	1906	DB 129	12 Red
Spirto gentil (FAVORITA—Donizetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1906		
In terra solo (DON SERASTIANO—Donizetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(82)	1907		
Un di all' azzurro, spazio guardai profondo (ANDREA CHIENIER—Giordano) <i>In Italian</i>	(82)	1907	DB 700	12 Red
Eternamente (Mascheroni) <i>In Italian</i>	(81)	1911	DB 121	12 Red
Mandella mia (Neapolitan Song) (Valente) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1913		
La mia canzone (Tosti) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1903	DA 548	10 Red
Non t'amo piu (Denza) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902		
Mattinata (Leoncavallo) <i>In Italian with piano acc. by composer</i>	(75)	1902	DA 546	10 Red
Vesti la giubba (PAGLIACCI—Leoncavallo) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902		
No, non chiuder gli occhi vaghi (GERMANIA—Franchetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1909	DA 543	10 Red
Studenti udite (GERMANIA—Franchetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1909		
No, non chiuder gli occhi vaghi (GERMANIA—Franchetti) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902	DA 544	10 Red
Studenti udite (GERMANIA—Franchetti) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902		
O dolce incanto (Il sogno) (MANON—Missenet) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(75)	1902	52345	10 Red (Single-sided)
O Lola, ch' ai di latti la cammisa (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA—Mascagni) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(74)	1902	DA 545	10 Red
Viva il vino spumeggiante (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA—Mascagni) <i>In Italian with piano</i>	(77)	1903		
Parmi veder le lagrime (RICCOLETTO—Verdi) <i>In Italian</i>	(80)	1911		
Una furtiva lagrima (ELISIR D' AMORE—Donizetti) <i>In Italian</i>	(78)	1911	DB 126	12 Red
Parted (Tosti) <i>In English</i>	(78)	1912	DA 118	10 Red
Pour un baiser (Tosti) <i>In French</i>	(82)	1909		
Cielo e mar l' etero velo splende come un santo allere (GIOCONDA—Ponchielli) <i>In Italian</i>	(81)	1911		
Lolita—Serenata Española (Buzzi-Peccia) <i>In Spanish</i>	(81)	1908	DB 696	12 Red

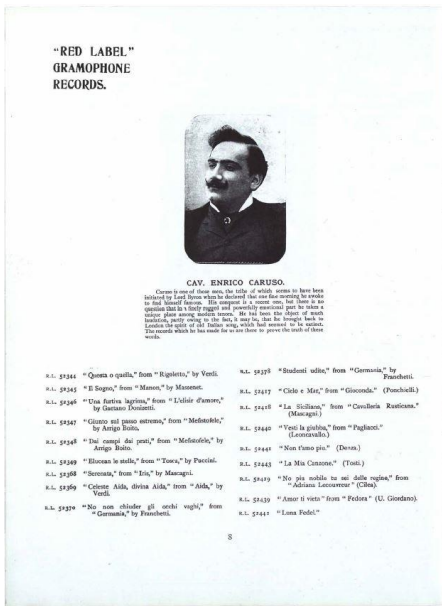
For Prices of Records see page 2.

Cover and page 7 of "His Master's Voice" Records of Unique and Historical Interest, the Historical Catalogue n.2 of the English company The Gramophone Co. Ltd in which 428 recordings are reported from 1900 to 1924.

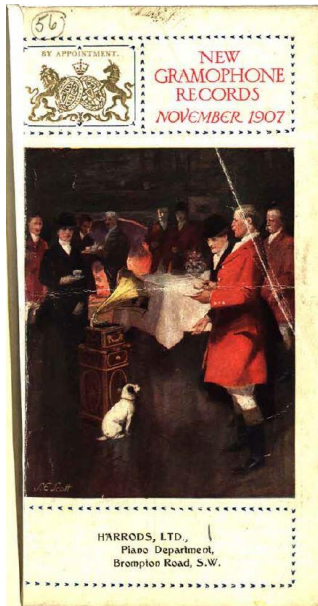
As you can see in the image on the right, the sound documents, in this case organized by performer, show, in addition to the title, the original rotation speed of the recording and the year of recording.

The fourth disc on this page is the one that contains the recordings of Spirto gentil and Ideale made by Enrico Caruso in 1906 at 80 and 78 rpm

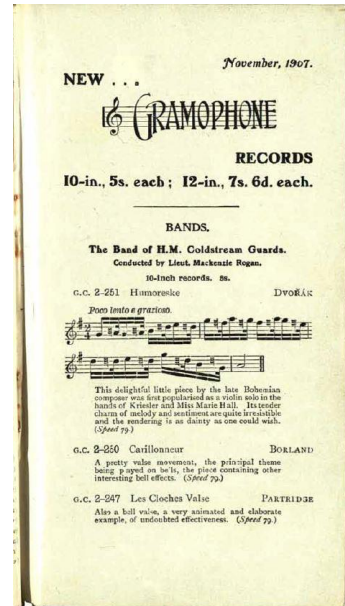
To conclude this brief examination on the practice of reporting the rotation speed along with the discographic information, it will be appropriate to remember that this practice is present in the catalogs of Gramophone - His Master's Voice since 1907, placing the information at the end of the description of the disc:



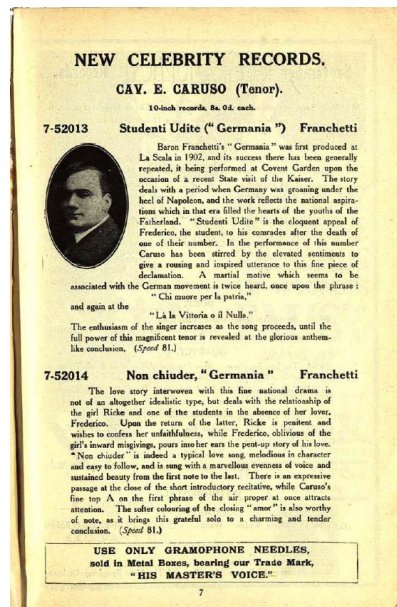
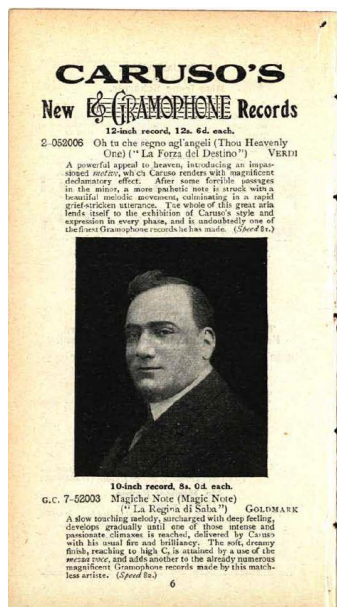
Red Label Gramophone Records catalog of 1904, p. 8  
The discographical information shows only the disc's editorial number and title.



His Master's Voice, New Catalogue November 1907, cover and p. 3  
In this catalog appears, placed between parentheses and after the other discographic data, the speed of rotation adopted during the recording with the obvious purpose of promoting a correct listening.



This practice, which is normally used for ordinary productions, is also employed, and perhaps even more so, for "Celebrity Records":



His Master's Voice, Novelty Catalogue January and October 1910, pp. 6 and 7

"His Master's Voice"

**Celebrity Records**

**Signor CARUSO (Tenor).**  
12-inch record, 12s. 6d.  
(with orchestral accompaniment)


**2-032007 Il fior che avevi a me ("Carmen")** *Bizet*

**T**HE present set of Caruso records have been made at a favourable moment when this great tenor was in exceptionally fine voice, since they seem to combine the lighter lyrical quality of his earlier performances with the resonance and power belonging to his riper days. All will remember that this air is sung by José as he draws a rose from his breast which has been flung at him by Carmen, and the song is an exquisite example of Bizet's genius. Its delicate character is brought out by Caruso with wonderful artistic skill, in the grace and savoury with which he gives the opening line. The performance, however, soon broadens out as the passion of the song deepens, from the *andante* through the declamatory passages on to the "Te riveler Carme." By the time we reach the concluding lines


*"C'he ti basto ad eh mostrarti"*

we hear the full power of the magnificent voice of the greatest of all tenors, and realize what a monumental performance this is, not only in respect to its vocal grandeur, but also because of the artistic balance with which the whole song is delivered. (*Speed 81*)

*Published by Metrolite & Co.*



Signor Caruso




You know it by this  
The Master's Voice

His Master's Voice, New Catalogue September 1911, p. 12

"His Master's Voice"

**CARUSO.**  
12-inch Record (Pink Label), 12s. 6d.

**02397 The Lost Chord** *Sullivan*  
(In English)



Signor Enrico Caruso. is very characteristic of the singer, the last verse also being worked up to an intense pitch, the final phrase in which the high B flat occurs, being very finely sung. Signor Caruso copes manfully with the difficulties of the English language, and his words are always clear, even when their shading is unusual. A record of much interest, which admirers of Signor Caruso will not fail to secure. (*Speed 81*.)

**T**HE singing of Sullivan's "Lost Chord" by Signor Caruso is an event which makes it possible for the public to hear the greatest of living tenors in a song which appeals to everybody. The dramatic power infused into the song, notably in the lines—

*"I have sought, but I seek it vainly,  
That one Lost Chord divine."*

**T**HE following Records, sung in English by Caruso, have already been issued.

10-inch Records, 8s.  
4-3122 For you alone.  
4-2599 Love in mine.

*Published by His Master's Voice.*

His Master's Voice, New Catalogue September 1912, p. 16

Whatever the reason that pushed the record company to adopt, during the recording phase, a speed instead of another (relationship between physical space of the disc and sound content to be inserted, width of the grooves and sound quality, etc.. One thing is certain: the freedom of use of this speed, which was reflected in the flexibility mechanisms that the reproducing machines had in choosing which one to use, never compromised the reasons of sound fidelity, a prestigious factor for the record company as evidenced by the presence in the catalogs of the suggestion to the users on the correct use during the listening phase.

(Translated with DeepL.com free version)