

IN MEMORY OF EDWARD J. SMITH

1913-1984

Edward J. ("Eddie") Smith might be called the patron saint of off-the-air recordings. His name was a household word for so many years that it is surprising to realize how little is known of his background and his personal history. I first knew Eddie in the late Thirties, and over the years I followed his activities, but I am indebted to his widow Anna for most of the following biographical details.

He was born in Brooklyn, New York on June 17, 1913. His mother, Sophia Sagere, was a concert pianist, pupil of Rafael Joseffy and Josef Hofmann. His father, Dr. Joseph Smith, was on the staffs of Brooklyn State and Kings County Hospitals and first President of the Brooklyn Neurological Society.

Eddie's major at Columbia University was in journalism, his minor in music. But he was also interested in sports, and from 1930 to 1933 he played baseball professionally as a catcher in various leagues. But music was in his background, and every summer from 1921 to 1930 was spent abroad with his mother. Thus he met, and in many instances heard perform, such artists as Lilli Lehmann, Richard Tauber, Lotte Lehmann, Titta Ruffo, Feodor Chaliapin, Beniamino Gigli, Jean de Reszke, Mattia Battistini, Edmond Clément, Josef Hofmann, Leopold Godowski, Albert Spalding, Fritz Kreisler, Olive Fremstad, Emma Eames, Geraldine Farrar, Elisabeth Rethberg, Giuseppe De Luca, and by no means least Giovanni Martinelli, who he said was like a second father to him.

From 1934 he was on the staff of Hollywood Reporter and Variety as reviewer, reporter, editorial writer, and music critic. From 1942 until 1946 he served in the Army Counter-intelligence Corps and Special Services with the 265th Coast Artillery. On his discharge he joined the Earl Ferris and Muriel Francis Publicity Agencies, handling publicity writing, stories, and the like for Lily Pons, Ezio Pinza, Yehudi Menuhin, Jussi Björling, Risë Stevens, Dorothy Kirsten, Lauritz Melchior, Grace Moore, and many others, including Jimmy Durante and Georgia Gibbs. Also in 1946 he became Associate Editor of The Musical Digest, and in three seasons he covered, among other things, 450 performances at the Metropolitan Opera. In 1948-1949 he was Editor-in-Chief of World Wide Music Syndicate, supplying some 168 daily papers and weeklies with a syndicated column.

And in 1949 his activities in the record business began when he founded the classical music department of Continental and Remington Records. He supervised recordings, wrote notes, and was responsible for engaging artists and deciding on repertoire. From 1951 he spent four years in Rome, recording 17 operas for Capitol, Decca, Vox, Remington,

Urania, and Plymouth. From 1954 to 1958 he was Music Director and A & R man for the Record Corporation of America, the parent company for such labels as Allegro, Royale, Plymouth, and (American) Gramophone. He continued there as music consultant for another year and founded Celebrity Record Corporation, serving also as Music Director of TAP (Top Artists Platters) Records. He left his mark on ASCO (American Stereophonic Corporation) Records too, which despite its name featured singers and instrumentalists of the past.

But most of us have known Eddie best by his productions on the EJS, UORC, and ANNA labels. These began with the foundation of the Golden Age of Opera series in 1956. At a time when the commercial companies were building an impressive catalog of studio recordings, Eddie was able to offer "actual" performances from the great opera houses of the world, including historic broadcasts from the Metropolitan. Many of the operas on his list had not been heard for many years (if ever) in this country: Die tote Stadt, Il Guarany, Feuersnot, Le Jongleur de Notre Dame, Violanta, Les Troyens, and countless others, some even more esoteric than these. And then there were the recitals by famous singers--often live from the concert hall--and the "Potpourris" which might include anything, from Professor Moreschi to Kirsten Flagstad. But surely it is not necessary to provide these details to ARSC members.

All Eddie's releases were announced by detailed program sheets. But in June 1971 this portentous note was added: "All things must end, and so, my friends, after 17 years, the Golden Age of Opera's regular series of releases will come with this June issue..." He accounted for a total of 566 releases of 725 LP records. Eddie was successfully operated on in 1972 for cancer of the colon. Cancer struck again in the thyroid gland in 1980, but again he recovered. Between these bouts he resumed his record activities with the UORC and ANNA labels, but in January 1984 a new attack diagnosed as adena carcinoma of the lung proved fatal. After a heroic fight Eddie died on July 11, 1984.

No one in the history of recording worked more devotedly over a long period of years than did Eddie Smith, and his ability to locate and produce unusual and often invaluable material is without parallel. We all owe him a debt of gratitude. And those of us who knew him will never forget his friendliness and his limitless enthusiasm. There will never be anyone like him.

Philip L. Miller