



His Master's  
**Voice**



MUSÉE DES ONDES EMILE BERLINER

## PIONEERS



# Walter Darling (1896 – 1976)

## A pioneer in Canadian, radio, recording, film and television

By Barry Lucking



The ASN Building at the corner of de Maisonneuve and Décarie.

### Introduction by Tim Hewlings

**W**alter Darling was born in Athens, ON July 19 1896. He had a sister Lily and a brother Stephen. When Walter was only 2 years old both his parents died, leaving the three children as orphans. They spent their youth in an orphanage operated by the Independent Order of Foresters (known as the I.O.F. Home) in Oakville. Walter enlisted in the army in 1915 during WWI as a telegraph operator, but was released a year later for medical reasons.

In 1923, he came to Montreal to work for the newly commissioned radio Station CFCF. In about 1928, he went to work for Herbert Berliner at Compo and in 1935 joined Associated Screen News where he remained for the next 20 years. He ended his working career at the CBC.

### Walter Darling Head of the sound department Associated Screen News (ASN) Recollections of Barry Lucking from "The ASN Chronicles"

**W**alter was the originator and head of the sound department at ASN. He was a short slim man with a head of wiry silver hair, wore small round spectacles the type, which are quite trendy today with the intellectual crowd. He often addressed men not by their name but by 'sir'. He was always neatly dressed usually wearing a tie and, at work, the regulation light brown cotton jacket. This was quite normal at ASN. Everyone wore these jackets other than the people who worked in the lab who wore long lab coats. They were issued every week and were deemed company policy to protect employees from the chemicals and to protect themselves from the usual dust, grease and dirt associated with film handling machinery. They were also a bit of a safety and sanitary measure, for they ensured the employees were always clean and free of contaminants that could cause problems in the film handling process.

Herbert Berliner, John Bradley and Walter Darling



Walter was a soft-spoken gentle man, was married and lived in the suburb of Lachine, Montreal Quebec. Tragically, he lost his young daughter to an accident and had no other children, he absolutely adored his wife and she him.

When I joined ASN in 1953 he was in his mid 50s, very active and considering an accident that he suffered in the 40's, was in excellent shape. This accident happened when he was the loca-



tion sound mixer on an Anglo-Canadian feature film shoot called 'The Forty-Ninth Parallel'. Somehow or other he ingested fine broken glass chips in a meal he was catered while on location, which left him with severe damage to his digestive system. Even after a couple of operations to correct the damage, he was left with a compromised digestive system that he had to contend with the rest of his life.

When he hired me, I was applying for a camera position for which there were no openings. Typical of his personality, when he read my CV he noted that not only had I worked for BBC Radio in London for one summer, and spent another with a film company, Lux Films. Both were jobs in sound, and since I had an EE degree, he thought I would be an ideal candidate for the sound department. Of course, those were summer jobs, one a cable puller, and the other threading-up dubbers\*, that my mother managed to arrange.

\* Note: A film "dubber" was a machine used to record and playback sound for film. It used film with a magnetic coating (like audio tape) and it was electrically synchronized (interlocked) to the film projector, as well as to other dubbers and recorders to ensure that the sound and picture played simultaneously.

Walter needed help in the ASN sound department, so he promised me that if I would start in the sound department, once a position in the camera department opened up I would probably get a position there. In any event, he hired me on the spot and I started the following day, and I never did join the camera department.

Walter was a pioneer in the sound industry in Canada, for which he never got recognition, he was such a quiet, unassuming private man that few took the time to know more about him, especially media archivists and historians. Walter pioneered the commercial radio industry. In his early days, he set-up, built and operated the first privately owned radio broadcasting station, Marconi's CFCF radio in Montréal. Walter told of his job at the station, where he was responsible for the transmitter including hand-making the transmission tubes and fashioning much of the transmitter itself. He looked after the on-air audio equipment, was the station programmer, operator, on-air host, producer, interviewer, and was even sometimes heard on air playing his beloved violin.

At ASN he was also a pioneer making sound recordings for film, but not only did he handle the recording side, he also looked after researching, selecting, installing and maintaining all the equipment. ASN's sound department was the first and probably only company to install professional sound equipment for film. It was a complete system made by Western Electric, known as Northern Electric in Canada. The systems were purchased from Northern outright but were also licensed to the user. The producer paid a royalty fee and was also obliged to give a screen credit for every film that used the system. The system included large tube-power amplifiers, a mixing console and some very limited equalizers. At the beginning for a short-lived period, it used interlocked record players for the dubbers (playback machines), a very cumbersome system to say the least. Later, interlocked film dubbers were installed, making it a leading-edge facility in its day.

In addition to looking after all the equipment, Walter was unique in that he also did the repairs to the optical film recorders, including a delicate and very precise recording device called 'strings'. This device was a sort of light valve or shutter that exposed negative photographic film to the audio in the form of elec-

tric current that was applied to the strings (wires), opening and closing the valve to the light source as the film passed it at a precise speed, thereby making a photographic record of the audio. The 're-stringing' was necessary when the 'strings' broke, which was quite often if the recording engineer over-modulated, and fed too much sound in the form of current to the strings when making a recording. It was a routine that was usually a factory repair, which meant that the 'strings' (light valve) were returned to Northern Electric for repairs. But not with Walter Darling, he devised a set-up, a sort of jig with the help of the machine shop that enabled him to do the re-stringing himself. The process was intricate and delicate and had to be done under a microscope.

The sound department was much in demand. Rarely were there quiet days, since, in addition to the regular fare of documentary film to work on, there were also the weekly newsreels to record, and the final mix.

Walter was a very fastidious man. Every morning before any recording was done, he and other members of the department

sionately professional and an artist at his trade. A man of few words yet a good communicator, very artistic, possessed great concentration abilities and was always sure and confident in his abilities. He rarely became flustered or distracted in what could be a very exacting and stressful job. His talents were quite extraordinary considering the rudimentary nature of the facilities (by today's standards). He was just as at home and as good at recording a single narrator voice-over, to recording a symphony orchestra, to making the final mix. Most of his expertise was self-taught. There were no recording schools in those days and few contemporaries from whom to learn. He had the intuitiveness to try and experiment with different ideas and was always open to suggestions.

Walter left ASN when it was sold to DuArt Film Labs of New York. At the time, he must have been over sixty, but not ready to retire. He was hired by the CBC in Montréal to run their Kinescope\* department.

\*Note: The Kinescope was the predecessor of the videotape



Sound recording for film

cleaned, dusted and lubricated all the machinery, (projectors, dubbers, console, and equipment racks, etc.). Everything had to be spotless... and it was. Walter also had quite a short fuse and had no patience with sloppiness or incompetence, and was quick to let offenders know it in no uncertain terms. Nevertheless, he was held in much respect by the people who worked for him, for he was also very patient and understanding when it came to teaching his people. He was a very good teacher and if you couldn't learn from Walter, you would probably never learn. When he wanted something done, he never told one what to do, he asked. He was needless to say, also a very talented sound engineer, sensitive, good with actors, and musicians, and much revered by film directors, who found him creative, quick to understand the mood and style of the film and the needs of the director, pas-

recorder. It was a device used to record a television program using 16 mm or 35 mm film as opposed to magnetic tape.

Here again his pioneering spirit was at work since Kinescope was the first and only means at that time of making copies of TV programs. But typical of Walter, he was not happy with the sound quality of the single-system Kinescope recorders, so he had an audio land-line installed between the CBC building and the ASN sound department. The audio for all the CBC Kinescopes was recorded live at ASN from the CBC land line. The negative film sound track was then processed and synchronized to the picture. The finished prints were produced from the two negatives, affording much improved audio quality.

To the best of my knowledge, Walter stayed with the CBC for the remainder of his career.

# Herbert Berliner Part 2

by Tim Hewlings



**B**y the year 1917 Gramophone, Columbia and Edison no longer had a monopoly on record production and Herbert decided to open up a separate record pressing plant to take advantage of the independent record business that had sprung up.

In 1918, Herbert bought a former schoolhouse at 131 18th Avenue in Lachine, QC [i] and opened Compo Ltd. to manufacture records produced by new, independent record labels from the US [11]. This was his own company, set up outside the family business, and it was apparently not well received by his father.

In 1919, Compo started pressing records for Phonola, and the Starr Piano Company (Starr and Gennett labels). [4] By 1919, Herbert had also established a state-of-the-art recording facility in Montreal and Canadian releases were starting to outnumber imports in the Berliner Gramophone catalogue.

Speaking to the Parliamentary Committee of March 11, 1932, Commander C.P. Edwards, Director of Radio, Department of Marine, said... "Broadcasting in Canada started with some test programs in 1919 carried out by the Canadian Marconi Company of Montreal. Regular organized programs commenced in December 1919 by the same company, and by 1922 broadcasting had been definitely established throughout the country". [9]

In 1919, radio broadcasting was in its infancy. Marconi began making experimental broadcasts from their station XWA on William Street in downtown Montreal. In May of 1920, they broadcast a live concert that was received at a meeting of the Royal Society at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa [ii]. By November 4, 1920 the radio station had received its commercial license and became CFCF, another Montreal institution. Herbert Berliner was among the first to recognize the power of radio as an advertising medium and on November 30, 1920 the Berliner Gramophone began regular broadcasts of Berliner recordings at Canada's first licensed radio station. These were Canada's first regular radio broadcasts, arguably the first regularly scheduled radio broadcasts anywhere.

Oliver Berliner: "By 1921 Emile had had enough of Herbert's operation of Compo in competition with the Berliner Co. An argument occurred which turned violent, and Herbert struck his father, knocking him down. Herbert left the Berliner Gramophone Co. that day. From that moment on, only his sister, Alice, remained in contact with Herbert. Curiously, at the time of Herbert's departure the "His Master's Voice" painting, made especially for Emile by the creator of it, Francis Barraud, disappeared and has not been found. Herbert's nephew, Oliver, son of Edgar who had replaced Herbert, believes that Herbert took it and that a descendant of Herbert probably has it now." [iii]

i Interview with John Bradley

ii Montreal Gazette May 21, 1920

iii Personal correspondence 2013-03-19

This incident occurred in April of that year and Herbert was forced to resign from Berliner Gram-O-Phone. He must have inspired great loyalty among his employees, because most of the executives left and joined him at Compo. His father never spoke to him again.

Compo released their first record on his new Sun Records label in May, 1921. Compo opened its first Montreal recording studio at 117 Metcalfe Street in July, and soon after opened one in New York. The first release recorded in the new studio was in September on the Apex label. He was selling his product for \$0.65 compared to \$1.00 charged by the major companies, which started a price war in the industry.

In 1924, once again showing Herbert's dedication to innovation and advancement of recording technology, Compo produced Canada's first "electrical" (as opposed to acoustic) recordings [1]. This was a year before Western Electric introduced their electrical recording system, which they eventually licensed to Victor and Columbia.

In 1925, when the Starr Piano Co. ended its recording activities, Compo took over the Starr name and continued to use it until 1953.

Under Herbert's direction, the Compo Company was responsible for the initial recordings of many of Quebec's most famous recording artists. Among the artists that benefited from H. S. Berliner were such greats as Mary Travers (La Bolduc), J-O. La Madeleine, Isidore Soucy, Rex Battle, Paul Dufaut, Rodolphe Plamondon and Don Messer and his Islanders, as well as singers Eugène Daignault, Ovila Légaré, Charles Marchand and Marcel Martel.



Montreal Gazette November 30, 1920

In 1926, Herbert brought another innovation to recording - recording live radio broadcasts for transcription and other material for reproduction such as commercials, station identifications, religious and political programmes, etc. This would enable radio stations to send material to stations in outlying areas. There were, however, technical difficulties with this, of the limited time available on 78 RPM transcription disks.

In 1929, this would lead H.S. Berliner to carry out the first experiments with 33-1/3 RPM records, in order to lengthen recording times on disks, at least two years before Columbia and RCA. During this time Herbert had a large house built high on Mount-Royal in Westmount. The house was designed by well-known architect Galt Durnford, and included a pipe organ on the main floor. The organ had come from the Midway Cinema in Montreal located on St-Laurent just below Ste-Catherine Street [22]. He moved into it in 1929, not long before the stock market crash.

In 1930, the studio on Metcalfe Street was closed and in 1931, Compo opened its new studio on the 9th floor of the Lennox building at 1485 Bleury Street. [8]

Record sales dropped dramatically during the depression and in an effort to keep afloat Compo pushed into the broadcasting market. By 1932, Compo was producing 15-minute-long 33-1/3 RPM records for the broadcast industry. [5] They even manufactured flooring tiles until about 1940. [8]

However, the personal cost to Herbert was high. In 1933, he was forced to sell his beautiful new house to save the company.

In 1935, Compo began a long association with Decca Records. Compo was licensed to press all the records for Decca in the USA and Canada. This association was at least partly responsible for allowing Compo to be the only Canadian independent record company to survive the depression.

John Bradley: "...Decca U.S.; he [H.S. Berliner] had been very friendly with the gentleman who founded that [probably Jack Kapp - TGH], that's how he got it, and Brunswick and all those various lines..." This included Bing Crosby, the most popular recording artist of the day.

In 1943, Robert A. (Bob) Chislett was appointed manager of the company, a post he would retain at least until the late 1960's.

In 1944, Compo began producing the first records made of Vinylite, producing the first vinyl records, predating Columbia's use of it for their LPs by 4 years.

Business was thriving and in 1945-46, Compo moved to a large facility up the street at 485 18th avenue in Lachine.

In 1948, Berliner hired John Bradley as his assistant and recording engineer/producer. (John operated the Compo Studio until it closed, and became a full-time employee of Compo in 1958. He remained Mr. Berliner's assistant until Berliner's death in 1966.)

In 1949 or 50, Compo became the first private recording studio in Montreal and one of the first in Canada to record on magnetic tape, using an Ampex model 301 taperecorder. [2]

Berliner sold Compo to Decca in 1951 after a health scare. He was mistakenly diagnosed with cancer and wanted to assure the survival of Compo. He bitterly regretted his decision for the rest of his life.

John Bradley: [After returning from New York with the first Ampex tape recorder to come to Montreal c.1951, probably after the Decca sale] "He agreed to come down to the studio and he walked in. He was always beautifully dressed, but he was in the style of his period - high boots with laces all the way up, and his watch and the chain across his vest, and everything fitted beauti-

fully, and so on. Normally, he would come into the studio and one of the first things he would do is pull his bow tie off and undo his jacket, or take his coat off and be in his vest, but he always looked elegant. And on this occasion he came in, and he didn't do all this because there were just the two of us. We weren't going to do a session. He was going to listen to a monaural playback, everything was still monaural then, and he said "OK, Brad, push the button." I said, "You push it." "No, Brad, you push the button."

He never returned to the studio after that. The supreme innovator, always demanding the latest in technology, rejected this latest advancement. Now almost 70 years old this was one final innovation that left him completely cold. Was it because his passion was cutting records, using a record lathe, or was it that his bitterness over losing his company was simply too profound?

The Compo studio finally closed in the late 1950's. It was outmoded, too noisy and was unsuitable for the new stereophonic recording techniques, and Decca decided that it had outlived its usefulness.

Herbert Samuel Berliner died on August 9, 1966. According to his wishes, there were only five people attendanced his funeral.

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### Next His Master's Voice

DESIGN Montreal RCA The Sixties and the Seventies

Herbert Berliner part 3

# At the MOEB

## News from the Exec:

**O**n behalf of the Board of Directors of the Musée des ondes Emile Berliner, I am pleased to welcome two new administrators to the Board this fall.

Mme Janine Kriber, a graduate of Laval University with a doctorate in political science from the Institut d'études politiques de Paris in 1992, joined the Board in October. She has been an assistant professor in the Department of political science at Concordia University and more recently, a Professor in the Department of strategic studies at RMC and the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean, QC. She has also taught at the University of Montreal and at Laval University. Madame Kriber has recently retired from her positions at RMC and the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean. A lover of both history and music, she is hoping to put her abilities and resources to good use in helping to promote the development of the Musée.

In November, Me Denise Dussault, a lawyer who specializes in labour and commercial law, primarily in the entertainment industry, was persuaded to join our team. We hope her experience and her numerous contacts will help the Musée to advance its future projects.

Pierre M. Valiquette, president of the Board of Directors

### A Big Thank You to Our Donors.

"Corporate donations and membership fees are the museum's main source of income and help cover part of the museum's operational costs. Your contributions make a difference, they help us keep the Musée des ondes in operation and open to the general public."

The Musée des ondes Emile Berliner would like to take this opportunity to thank all that have helped us over that last year.

The Musée des ondes Emile Berliner received several grants in 2016:

\$25 000 from Arrondissement le Sud-Ouest, Montréal, Benoit Dorais and local elected officials.

\$400 from Québec Government, Dominique Anglade, Member of the National Assembly for Saint-Henri-Sainte-Anne

The MOEB also Sponsorship for \$3 355 from the MacDonald Dettwiler and Associates Corporation.

Plus many donations from our members and friends of the Musée des ondes Emile Berliner

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Plus another 34 persons who donated between \$30 to \$99. And the large group of volunteers who generously donated their time.

**THANK YOU!**

# A New Acquisition

by Anja Borck



**A** Saba Schauinsland Telerama P1026H projection TV from 1958, acquisition number 216-0169-1. It weighs 75 kilograms, sits on wheels and is quite a massive piece of furniture. Another improvement of the Schauinsland Telerama was that it came with a large metallic screen (130 by 98 cm) that was intended to be hung on a wall while the unit projected onto it.

Saba was a German electronics manufacturer and its first line of television sets was brought out in 1953 with the name "Schauinsland" - meaning "observe the country side."

According to old advertisements published by the German Television Museum in Wiesbaden, the Telerama came with a wired remote control that featured six functions: volume, contrast, luminosity, focus, and a choice to have better speech or music sound quality. With only two channels offered in Germany until 1964, surfing through the broadcasted options was not high in demand. The sales price of 3 000 Deutsch Mark for the package targeted only the very rich.

Left, The projector unit with the remote wrapped up at the base;  
Below, A family enjoying their Telerama.





Musée des ondes Emile Berliner: Calendar

DESIGN Montreal RCA The Sixties and the Seventies: Opens 09 April  
The MOEB AGM 26 April at 19:00 in room E-206, Lenoir street

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*Best Wishes for 2017 to all of the MOEB's members and Friends*



Postcard from the collection of Joseph Pereira

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