

# Local Author Writes 'Labor of Love'

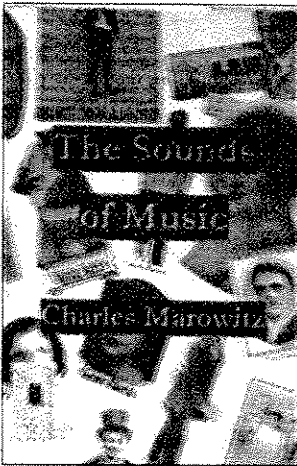
In his latest book, "The Sounds of Music: Early Recording Artists," Malibu resident Charles Marowitz explores and profiles the lives of some of the first recording stars from the early 1900s to the start of WWII.

Marowitz, who has written more than two dozen books—mainly about theatrical subjects, including Chekhov and Shakespeare—considers "Sounds of Music" a departure from his usual subject matter, but it is a labor of love.

"I've been collecting 78 rpm records since I was eight years old," he said. He considered his collecting and "informal study of the artists" a hobby and was convinced by a friend to write a book about it.

"There's a funny feeling when you play a record that was recorded in the early 1900s, you're hearing the actual atmosphere that's in the discord of the record," he said, describing his passion for the old recordings.

Although the book contains many familiar profiles, including Fanny Brice, Al Jolson, Eddie



Cantor, Sophie Tucker and Rudy Vallee, there are others who played major roles in the early recording industry, but are less well known today.

Two artists that Marowitz found especially interesting were Ada Jones and Billy Murray, "who started the recording industry in the early 1900s; they were very versatile and very talented," he said.

In the book, the pair's voices are described as perfect for recording: "Murray and Jones had voices that entered into amatory relationships with the phonograph; the medium and the artists seemed to be made for each other."

Although it took him two years to write, Marowitz says that it took him three years to publish, because of the book's esoteric subject matter, its appeal is to a specific "niche public." But he notes that niche public is a fairly large group of antique phonograph clubs throughout the world.

Marowitz cites CAPS, the California Antique Phonograph Society, which meets four times a year in Glendora. Marowitz said that at the first meeting he attended, there were people of all ages—"some old fogeys and lots of young kids with an enormous amount of enthusiasm."

Marowitz said that locating research sources was challenging because many of the books were out of print and difficult to find, but researching the subjects themselves was fascinating because of the tremendous differences in each performer's career.

"The research was eye-opening," said Marowitz. "It was a funny thrill to find out that some of them appeared in musicals,

were early silent screen stars, or Ziegfeld girls. Or to find out that someone you know as a recording star was involved with gangsters."

Marowitz says that the irony of the success of recordings is that Edison envisioned his phonograph for an entirely different purpose. "He thought of the gramophones as an aid to dictation," Marowitz said. "He [Edison] never thought of it as something for recording music."

BY ROBBY MAZZA