



# Lost: Thomas Edison's *Mood Music* Found: New Ways of Listening

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'Music can noble hints impart,  
Engender fury, kindle love,  
With unsuspected eloquence can move  
And manage all the man with secret art.'

– Joseph Addison.<sup>1</sup>

In a November, 1920 letter to Thomas Edison, William Maxwell, the Vice President of the Musical Phonograph Division at Thomas A. Edison Inc., described a program he was overseeing at the time, titled *What Music Will Do For You*. The program was to be a scientific collection of data on the emotional effects of music. It would also promote the Edison phonograph and the company's Re-Creation line of records. Additionally, the *What Music Will Do For You* promotional campaign would, Maxwell explained, 'get the people interested in an analysis of their reactions to music.'<sup>2</sup> On his copy, Edison scribbled in the margin of the letter: 'This will be good propaganda.' In other internal memoranda, Maxwell pitched the *What Music Will Do For You* promotion to the phonograph dealers and shop owners as 'real research. . . one of the most interesting experiments ever made in the world of music.'<sup>3</sup>

What was this epochal intersection of science, affect theory, and marketing? Unfortunately, I could not find the publication listed in the catalog of the William Maxwell Papers, nor was I able to locate it during the several weeks I spent finely combing through the archives of the Thomas Edison National Historic Park. Later, I found that the title of this publication had been changed to the even more provocative: *Mood Music: A compilation of 112 Edison Re-Creations according to 'what they will do for you.'* Still, I had no success in locating anything more substantial than references to the booklet in correspondence. While the archivist of the Thomas Edison National Historic Park admitted that it might well exist (the cataloging of the Edison papers is ongoing), he had not yet come across an actual copy. Worldcat.org tantalizingly listed the publication details but no holding locations. After two years of increasingly determined but consistently unsuccessful searching, all I had found were a handful of filled out cards from a mood survey (more on this in a moment). These cards, though intriguing, were only the raw data upon which *Mood Music* was based.

I also found a couple annotated lists of ReCreation selections with suggestive headings like 'Castles in the Air' and 'To Give you Energy.' Still, no *Mood Music*. I decided then that *Mood Music* had been so limited in its print run and distribution that it was simply lost.<sup>4</sup>

## Lost...

*Mood Music*, was written and published in 1921 by the auspices of the Thomas A. Edison, Inc. The booklet fully materialized the twin, intertwined scientific research and marketing goals of the *What Music Will Do For You* efforts, which became the Edison-Carnegie Music Research Program. *Mood Music* was thirteen pages long and included six illustrations as well as a Mood Change Chart filled out by celebrity private eye, William Burns.<sup>5</sup> Readers would not find within, the foreword explained, such familiar classifications as 'Operatic Gems' or 'Band Music.' Instead, *Mood Music* served an entirely new purpose, one based on three years of psychological experiments. Having recently harnessed the power of music in the service of humanity with his invention of the phonograph, Edison was once again calling upon science to offer phonograph owners 'a far more reaching possibility for the practical application of music' than had been previously supposed.<sup>6</sup> As the long version of its title boasted – 'a compilation of 112 Edison Re-Creation according to 'what they will do for you' – the booklet was organized according to the records' effects on the minds and bodies of listeners.'<sup>7</sup>

The text continued: 'Has it occurred to you that music might be made to bring more than pleasure? – that its mysterious compelling power might be utilized to do you much practical good?'<sup>8</sup> Music could be a means to more than a generic pleasure. According to advertising copy for the booklet, psychologists studying the mood effects of music found 'that certain Edison Re-Creations had remarkable power to banish fatigue, nervousness and the blues.'<sup>9</sup> Though by no means encompassing the vast spectrum of

<sup>4</sup> Briefly, until it appeared on Worldcat.org, because Edison had halted the funding for the psychology research in 1921 and Maxwell had left the Edison Company in 1922, I was convinced that *Mood Music* simply hadn't been published.

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence indicates that the Edison Company selected William Burns as the face of the Mood Change Chart campaign because he embodied the right combination of celebrity, sophistication, and authority. Edison reportedly asked his associates who the most sophisticated man in New York was. To which they unanimously replied 'William J. Burns!' On November 15, 1920, Burns was the first individual to take the Mood Change Test. His filled out chart was included in advertising copy. 11/17/1920 Letter from Nixon to Maxwell, Box 17, Thomas Edison National Historic Park.

<sup>6</sup> *Harrisburg Telegraph*, vol. 90, issue 40 (February 16, 1922), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Mood Music*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Mood Music*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Print advertisement by Dixon's Music Shop in *The North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune*.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Addison, 'Song for St. Cecilia's Day, 1764, Oxford.' Opening epigram of *Mood Music* (Thomas Edison Inc., 1921).

<sup>2</sup> 11/20/1920 Letter from Maxwell to Edison, Box 16, William Maxwell Files, Thomas Edison National Historic Park.

<sup>3</sup> 2/22/21 Letter from Maxwell to dealers, Box 19, William Maxwell Files, Thomas Edison National Historic Park.

**The Power in Music released at last**

Mr. Edison's greatest ambition has been to see every home make use of the power of music. This demand, first, a phonograph of complete realism, no less. At a cost of three million dollars, he put his new invention to the famous comparison test, which no more talking machine has ever sustained. This drawing from a photograph shows one of these tests. The singer is Miss Muzio, prima donna solo of the Metropolitan Opera Company. The listener is Hambrook, principal conductor at the Metropolitan. Hambrook said, "The quality of Miss Muzio's voice and the quality of its Re-Creation by the New Edison are identical."

This marvellous invention has, at last, released the power in music.

**now comes MOOD MUSIC**

"Mood Music" is a 32 page book—the newest and greatest step forward in Mr. Edison's plan for music in the home. "Mood Music" shows what music will do for you,—now that the phonograph of complete realism is a fact. It tells which selections will refresh you when you're tired, which will cheer you when you're depressed, which will calm you when you're nervous.

Bring or send the coupon—and get your copy of "Mood Music". It's free.

This wonderful development in music has grown out of a two years' research into the effects of music. This research was under the direction of Dr. W. V. Bingham, Director of the Department of Applied Psychology, Carnegie Institute of Technology. Dr. Bingham was assisted by other noted psychologists, and thousands of music lovers who filled out Mood Change Charts.

These psychologists found that certain Edison Re-Creations had remarkable power to banish fatigue, nervousness and the blues. They arranged these selections under the headings such as "To Make You Joyous", "To Bring You Peace of Mind", etc.,—and called this kind of music Mood Music.

**Use: Coupon and Get Your Copy**

If you own a New Edison, get a copy of this free booklet at once. Begin to use music in this new—of practical ways. If you do not own a New Edison, find out what this wonderful instrument and Mood Music can be made to do for you. We'll give you ten days of Mood Music at your home. No charge or obligation. Money—bring or send—the coupon. Use it today.

**Dixon's Music Shop**

**Bring or Mail This Coupon**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

This coupon entitles you to five copies of "Mood Music". If you wish three days of Mood Music free, check here: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1. *Mood Music* advertisement, *The North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune* (September 13, 1921).

human emotion, *Mood Music* offered compilation lists for twelve distinct moods, covering 'almost every need of the average daily life.'<sup>10</sup> In this way, *Mood Music* was presented as a musical medicine chest, organized for the easy selection of specific records necessary to eliminate current, undesirable moods and generate alternatives.

The moods available to choose from:

1. To Stimulate and Enrich Your Imagination
2. To Bring You Peace of Mind
3. To Make You Joyous
4. In Moods of Wistfulness
5. Jolly Moods and Good Fellowship
6. For More Energy!
7. Love – and Its Mood
8. Moods of Dignity and Grandeur
9. The Mood for Tender Memory
10. Devotion is Also a Mood
11. Stirring
12. For the Children

Each mood received a page of space though sometimes there was an additional page with an image illustrating the individual's state before and after listening to the appropriate selection. On the mood page, short descriptions encouraged the reader to envision him or herself in a specific physical and mental state (exhausted limbs, a brain that refuses to function, droopy face, etc.). This was followed with some version of the imperative to 'play these pieces below to feel X.' Then there was a list varying in length from nine to thirteen Edison Re-Creation record titles, complete with

pertinent purchase information like cost and catalog number. Perhaps phonograph owners would see fit to organize their Re-Creation records similarly, in terms of their mood effects. Certainly the Edison Company encouraged its phonograph owners to approach their musical experience in this way. The booklet was a marketing scheme that sought to bolster its claims with impressive scientific findings. Readers were instructed to 'see what music can be made to do for you. Begin to utilize its power.'<sup>11</sup>

The promotional coverage of *Mood Music* borrowed heavily from the text's own origin story of Edison's vision of neat shelves of music organized according to the Re-Creation's mood effect. Perhaps these shelves would contain, for example, a volume with "Ave Maria" Play – when worried and nervous' printed on its spine (see Figure 1).<sup>12</sup> By approaching their record collection with the aid of *Mood Music*, readers could both bring about a desired mood – say, peace of mind – and help make Edison's vision of a future full of carefully curated music collections a reality.

### The Edison-Carnegie Music Research Program

At the end of 1919, the marketing firm employed by Thomas A. Edison Inc. contacted Walter Van Dyke Bingham, Director of the Division of Applied Psychology at the Carnegie Institute of Technology.<sup>13</sup> Bingham is likely better known for his later work developing the first generation of intelligence and personality tests for both private industry and the U.S. War Department. The Carnegie Institute of Technology was one of the technical schools founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1900 and would later merge with the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research to become Carnegie Mellon University. Bingham's Division of Applied Psychology was part of the university's expansion in the second decade of the twentieth century. The Edison Company supplied Bingham with two Edison phonographs, a complete set of Re-Creation records (443 total), and \$10,000 (just over \$130,000 today) to study 'the psychological reactions which definite forms of music produce in the human mind.'<sup>14</sup> Bingham used the funds to establish the Edison-Carnegie Music Research Program. The Program had two research departments: the Music Research Department, which examined the effects of music, and the School Research Department, which studied the use of phonographs in grade schools.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the work of the Edison-Carnegie Music Research Program consisted of evaluating the Re-Creation catalog, cross-referencing selections with sales numbers, and developing a new classification scheme (one potentially based on a record's effects rather than, say, its recording date,

<sup>11</sup> *Mood Music*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Harrisburg Telegraph*, vol. 90, issue 40 (February 16, 1922), p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> I have previously discussed Bingham's psychological studies in my article, 'Sound Objects and Sound Products: Creating a New Culture of Listening in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,' *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, vol. 4 (2012): 599–616. For more on the research of the Edison-Carnegie Research Program, see Emily Thompson's article, 'Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877–1925,' *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 71, no. 1 (1995): 131–171 and David Suisman's monograph, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> 11/3/1919 Letter from Henry Eckhardt to Bingham, Reel 16, Folder 0153, Walter Van Dyke Bingham Collection, Carnegie Mellon University Libraries.

<sup>15</sup> Bingham and Max Schoen, who was Head of the Department of Psychology and Education at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, ran the Music Research Department. Esther Gatewood of Randolph Macon College and Paul Farnsworth of Columbia University.

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