

RECORDED BY VINTON WIGHT VOLUME FIVE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FX 6156

Sounds of Steam Locomotives

THE STACK MUSIC SPECTACULAR



ETCHING BY REGINALD MARSH, 1929

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MUSIC LP

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**Sounds of Steam
Locomotives
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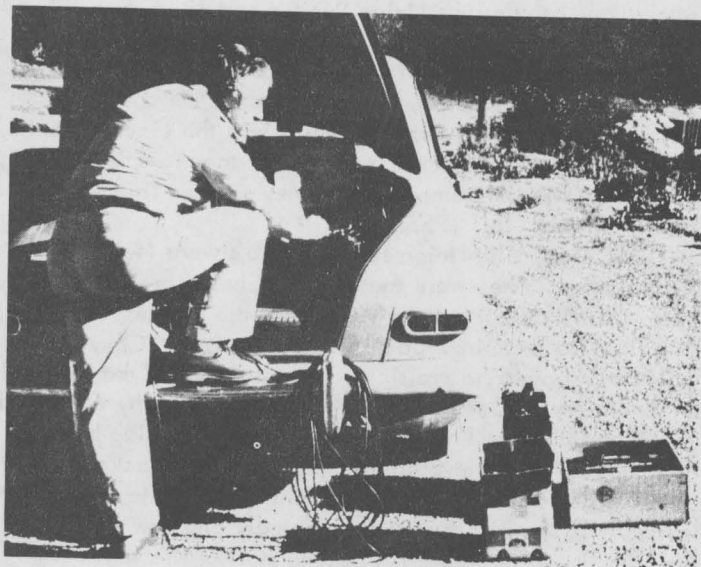
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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

(Reginald Marsh etching from the
collection of Moses Asch)

Sounds of Steam Locomotives THE STACK MUSIC SPECTACULAR



VINTON WIGHT

Although he is retired now, Vinton Wight has been interested in trains and railroading all of his life. He did recording professionally for 36 years. So it is only natural that these two interests should be combined in a dramatic collection of railroad recordings. He did most of his railroad recording from 1952 to 1959 while steam locomotives were still in use. These sounds are not new. They are from an era that has past.

The idea for this collection came about when he was vacationing in the Canadian Rockies. As he watched three locomotives struggle up Kicking Horse Pass with a freight train he longed for a recorder, that he might preserve the dynamic action that he witnessed.

He suddenly realized that soon the steam locomotive would be no more, so in 1952 he started recording all the material he could find concerning them. He felt the steam engine had individuality, personality as well as its steam and smoke. It was a living breathing thing that made delightful sounds when it came to life and went into action.

This collection naturally centered around the railroad equipment prevalent in his locality and that of his greatest interest. Hence, most of these recordings were made in Nebraska and the high country of Colorado and Wyoming. It was amazing the drama that he found right in his own backyard, when he thought all the exciting railroading was elsewhere.

This type of recording was not without its problems and troubles. Number one was wind. The wind blows constantly in Nebraska, and the wind causes a noise in the microphone. The number two problem was unwanted noise such as automobile traffic, airplanes, live stock, and even bees buzzing near the microphone. It was not always possible to avoid these interfering sounds, but a technique for editing the tape was developed that made it possible to remove them. One 30 minute tape recording had to be edited in 44 places. This is tedious work but the results are worth it.

He was aided on recording sprees by his tolerant understanding wife Dorothy, who counted the cars, noted the engine numbers, and did her knitting while waiting for the next train to come.

THE STACK MUSIC SPECTACULAR

Spectacular is the word for this collection of steam railroad sounds. Some of these situations are the result of unnatural conditions. Others are everyday occurrences. They are spectacular because of the unusual situation, the condition of the terrain, or the unique motive power that is used. Really all steam railroading was spectacular.

(TRACK #1) "Toughy Hill" is located 25 miles north of Lincoln, Nebraska. It is on the Union Pacific route between Omaha and Kansas City. Short sections of this grade is 4%. It will average probably 2% for three or four miles. This is a good climb for prairie country, and is a good spot for something spectacular. That is just what happens in early fall 1952 when helper #5042, with a 2-10-2 wheel arrangement, assists #9062, one of the unique three cylinder 4-12-2 road engines, over this grade.

Notice the difference in the sound of these two locomotives as first one dominates, and then the other, as the train winds around the many curves. The sharp staccato is from the helper #5042 and the mushy "off-beat" exhaust is from the three cylinder #9062.

(TRACK #2) The Union Pacific developed the Challenger type locomotive. It was an articulated type with a 4-6-6-4 wheel arrangement. Articulated means it had two sets of drivers and cylinders that operated independent of each other. They were two locomotives in one. The ultimate in the Challenger type was the 3900 series. These were thought by many to be the handsomest articulated ever built. They also had the nicest sound. They were built for 70 mile an hour running in either freight or passenger service.

Back in August 1954, there were still a lot of fast passenger trains. The freight trains had to be sidetracked to let the passenger trains pass to maintain their fast schedule. This is exactly what takes place at Kimball, Nebraska as #3958 pulls into a siding and stops. Then the Gold Coast limited with high stepping #800 (4-8-4) passes. The track then clear, #3958 whistles a highball (two long blasts) and continues on its way west.

(TRACK #3) It gets very cold in Cheyenne in January. When a heavy locomotive sets out in the cold for several

months it is a hard thing to move. Here is a little six wheel switcher, #4466 moving such a locomotive on a very cold January day in 1955.

(TRACK #4) Grand Island, Nebraska is a Union Pacific prairie town. Ordinarily one locomotive moves the freight trains. Occasionally extra speed, or extra tonnage call for extra power. This was true one day in September 1956. When #809 (4-8-4) ahead, followed by #3816 (4-6-6-4) are just leaving Grand Island. Only #809 is working as they leave the yards. This is quite a struggle, but the engineer is an artist with the throttle, and he keeps the train moving. Just as they pass, the signal for #3816 to start working comes forth. As they work together they pick up speed and take off in earnest. Spectacular? Ah yes!!!

(TRACK #5) The Burlington hauls coal from southern Illinois north through Beardstown and Galesburg. At Fredrick the track climbs out of the Illinois river valley. Here the Burlington used their biggest power. The 6300 series had a 2-10-4 wheel arrangement. On a fall day in October 1956, #6324 had just paused before starting the climb with 99 cars of coal. Four blasts from the whistle signal the flagman back on the train. Then two more blasts start them moving as they cannonade up the grade out of the valley.

SIDE 2

(TRACK #1) The Norfolk and Western designed and built their own steam locomotives in Roanoke, Virginia. Just out of Roanoke is the grade over the Blue Ridge mountains. This was where the #1236 (4-6-6-4) was found in August 1958, on the head-end of 200 empty coal hoppers. To get over the grade #1257 (2-8-8-2) was pushing on the tail-end. The pusher cut off just before passing the recording position. As it backed down it was stopped by Assistant Trainmaster Jackson who asked for whistles in behalf of the recordist. Listen as this lone locomotive continues downgrade—SPECTACULAR!!

(TRACK #2) Just a simple 'ole locomotive starting can be

spectacular, especially when it is #3996, a Union Pacific 4-6-6-4. Here in August 1957 is this simple spectacular sound as this westbound freight starts at Ogallala, Nebraska.

(TRACK #3) Now for a real bit of nostalgia. #42 is an ex-Rio Grande Southern, narrow gauge, locomotive with a 2-8-0 wheel arrangement. It was built in 1887. Here in August 1959 it was performing on track laid in the short lived Magic Mountain Park, west of Denver. Here is a re-created spectacular of yesteryear as #42 pulls into the station, pauses, and then continues 'round the mountain.

(TRACK #4) The 9000 series, three cylinder locomotives with a 4-12-2 wheel arrangement were used only on the Union Pacific. The 12 drive wheels were on a rigid frame. This made them the largest rigid frame locomotives in the world, and at one time Union Pacific had 88 of them. The third cylinder was in the center between the other two. This gave them an unusual off-beat sound. Listen now as #9052 arrives at Lincoln, Nebraska from Omaha with a destination of Kansas City. It eases into the Lincoln yard where they set out a car or two. After they re-couple and whistle off, they resume their journey south. This was recorded in early fall 1952.

(TRACK #5) The Union Pacific 3800's were (4-6-6-4) articulated. They were the earliest Challenger type. They were built for mountain railroading in the rockies. Union Pacific used them in 1956 between Omaha and Cheyenne to pull freight over the prairies. The climb out of the Missouri River Valley in Omaha required a helper. So, here we find #3827 on the head end with #2151 (2-8-2) pushing behind the caboose. As the train climbs the hill they acknowledge a signal with two blasts on their screeching whistle. As they struggle up the hill they slip repeatedly and one wonders if the #2151, on the rear, isn't doing most of the work. Actually you hear very little of the #2151 because it uncouples just before they pass the recording location. All that is heard from them is the clanking rods as they pass. They switch over to the downhill track and clank back to the yards in Council Bluffs. This is August 1956.

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