

Living Arts

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BSO recording from 1906 will air tomorrow

By Geoff Edgers
GLOBE STAFF

For a century, the moment was nothing more than a scribbled entry on a long forgotten studio ledger. Four trombonists, billed as the Boston Symphony Orchestra Trombone Quartet, gathered in Camden, N.J., in the winter of 1906. Huddled over a large, metal horn, they recorded a short pop ditty, "The Kerry Dance."

Tomorrow, thanks to a Florida record collector and a serendipitous turn of events, that song — believed to be the earliest known recording featuring members of the BSO — will be played on the radio for the first time. After WGBH found out about it earlier this week, the station included "The Kerry Dance" as part of its Sunday broadcast, which takes place exactly 125 years, to the day, after the BSO's first concert in 1881.

"Even if it sounded bad, I'd still be thrilled," said Brian Bell, who produces the BSO broadcasts. "But I think it sounds great."

Little is known about the recording sessions that led to "The Kerry Dance." Three of the players, Carl Hampe, August Mausebach, and Leroy Kenfield, were longtime members of the BSO. The fourth trombonist remains unknown.

Together, they went to Victor's studios in Camden for a pair of sessions in January 1906. The single-sided record issued in April sold for 60 cents, about \$14 in today's dollars.

"The Kerry Dance" is likely named for the county in Ireland. The BSO quartet version is an instrumental, with a gloomy middle passage played in a minor key before the trombonists revert to the faster tempo of the first sections. (The song has such melancholy lyrics as "Time goes by and the happy years are dead.")

"You can hear the rich bass, you can hear the dynamics, you can hear that this is clearly a group that plays together a lot," said Douglas Yeo, the BSO's veteran trombonist.

He spoke from the living room of his home in Lexington after showing off the

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Carl Hampe, August Mausebach, and Leroy Kenfield recorded "The Kerry Dance" (top) with an unknown player.



JANET KNOTT/GLOBE STAFF

BSO trombonist Douglas Yeo hopes those who hear the recording will realize that the players are making history.

One BSO mystery is solved, one still remains

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song, converted to CD, on his stereo yesterday morning.

Though the BSO documents its extensive history in its archives, nobody knew about the record. It came to Yeo's attention two years ago when he was contacted by Florida resident Howard Knapp, a former middle school band leader who plays trombone and collects records. Knapp had purchased "The Kerry Dance" on eBay for \$30. He wrote to Yeo, known for his essays on music history, to see if he could track down the names of the BSO's trombone section in 1906.

Yeo doesn't know much about the players, other than their professional histories. In a photo he found in the BSO archives, the three men, who would play together for almost 20 years, stand with their instruments. Wearing formal attire, they stare at the camera, deadly serious.

Two of the players were of German descent, Yeo said, common in an orchestra formed by hiring European players, and

then there is Kenfield, a New England-born player who would go on to lead a local band and help develop a special mouthpiece for the trombone.



OLDEST KNOWN BSO RECORDING

Listen to an audio clip at boston.com/ae/theater_arts.

When Knapp first contacted him, Yeo had no idea of the historical significance of "The Kerry Dance." Then, earlier this week, Bell, the WGBH producer, e-mailed him. Bell had been thumbing through the Victor discography. He noticed a reference to the quartet's session. If that record truly existed, Bell knew, it would be the earliest featuring BSO players.

After reaching Yeo by e-mail, the two put together what they had stumbled upon.

"I'm hoping when people hear this, they'll realize that these four players are not just making a difference in the musical life of Boston or New England, they're making musical history," said Yeo.

He concedes there is still a mystery he wants to solve. Who is the fourth player?

BSO trombonist Ron Barron and Yeo have tossed around some possibilities, ranging from Gustave Strube, then a BSO violinist who sometimes played trombone, to local freelancers Henry Woebler and Appleton E. Brown.

"But I'm not sure we'll ever find out, frankly," says Barron.

As for the original copy of the record, Knapp has decided to send "The Kerry Dance" and a second quartet recording made in February 1906 to the BSO's archives. The recordings are an exciting discovery, says New York music historian Joseph Horowitz, the author of "Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall."

"This is a period when Boston was the preeminent orchestra in the country," said Horowitz. "So anything that brings attention to that period is of intense interest. It's a time capsule, a window on another time that was a glorious time for symphonic music in Boston."