

DR/199: The Recording of *My Gal Sal* by Red Nichols and His Five Pennies - submitted by Albert Haim

Paul Dresser, born Johann Paul Dreiser, Jr. in 1857 in Terre Haute, Indiana, was a highly successful songwriter in the 1890s. In addition, he was an actor, musician, playwright and music publisher, and the older brother of the famous American novelist Theodore Dreiser. Dresser's most famous composition, music and lyrics, was *On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away*. It was published in 1896 and adopted as the official song of the state of Indiana on March 14, 1913. Paul Dresser was inducted in the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970.

Dresser published the song *My Gal Sal* in 1905, one year before he died. At this time, "Dresser was broke, his publishing house had failed, and in the little two-room office he occupied, he declared: "I've got a million dollar song in *My Gal Sal* but not a dime in my pocket to push it with." [1] *My Gal Sal*, Dresser's most successful song, was a tribute to his friend and companion Annie Brae, known professionally as Sally Walker, the proprietor of a whorehouse in Evansville, Indiana. The song was used in a 1930 Fleischer 'bouncing ball' cartoon [which featured the lyrics scrolled horizontally across the screen, with a bouncing ball keeping the words to the music], and it was the title of a 1942 Hollywood bio-pic with Victor Mature playing the role of Paul Dresser.

Between 1927 and 1928, Red Nichols, with various groups, recorded three versions of *My Gal Sal*:

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| May 18, 1927 | The Charleston Chasers.
Col 1539-D, mx 144168-2 |
| Sep 1, 1927 | Miff Mole and His Molers
OK 40932, mx 81413-B |
| Feb 25, 1928 | Red Nichols and his Five Pennies
Not issued, mx E-26751, E-7170, E-7171,
E-26752
(E-7170 and E-7171-1 are Vocalion matrices;
E-26751 and E-26752 are Brunswick matrices). |

In a letter dated Aug 10, 1945, Red Nichols wrote to Ralph Venables, "My Gal Sal was never released anywhere - as I never was paid for the recording ... I have the only test in my possession." [2] Indeed, all takes were rejected by order of

Brunswick record producer Jack Kapp, upon mutual agreement between Red Nichols and Jack Kapp. The Brunswick files indicate, "Cancelled." "B side bad on wear." "Cancels p. n. C356 for 3855." p. n. is a ledger entry indication that Br 3855 was scheduled to be released, but was cancelled.

In a curious set of events, it turns out that one copy of Canadian Br 4844, ordinarily [3] a coupling of *Five Pennies* (recorded Jun 20, 1927, mx E-23668) and *Japanese Sandman* (recorded Feb 27, 1928, mx E-26695) was found to be defective by Harry Avery (b. Oakland, Jul 1912-d. Oakland Apr 1984), California record collector and Red Nichols specialist who studied cornet with E. W. Nichols, Red's father.

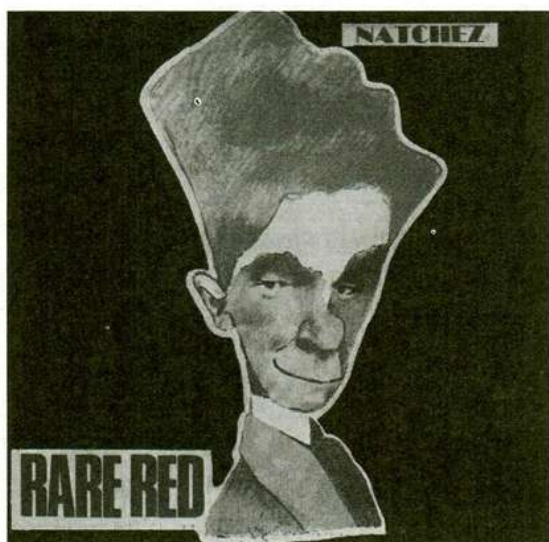
As noted in Esquire's *Life and Reminiscences Jazz Book*, edited by Paul Eduard Miller, 1944, "Harry Avery of California and Phil Diamond, a University of Michigan, professor-collector, concentrate on white groups using all-Negro band recordings to trade for their fond Red Nichols combinations." Harry Avery made an astute discovery when he realized that the side labeled *Five Pennies* in his copy of Br 4844 played *My Gal Sal* instead.

This was noted in subsequent discographies by Brian Rust, "Some copies of Brunswick 4844 play *My Gal Sal* (from matrix E-26751, q.v.) although labeled as *Five Pennies*." [4], and by Ross Laird, "Brunswick 4844 is designated Toronto only (for Canadian distribution) and normally couples masters E-23668 and E-26695 but some copies are reported to use master E-26752." [5]



It will be seen that Rust and Laird agree in that at least one copy of Canadian Br 4844 play *My Gal Sal* although labeled *Five Pennies*, but they disagree as to which take of "My Gal Sal" was mistakenly pressed on Br 4844. The version available on the website jazz-on-line.com, is listed as E-26752. The version remastered by J. R. T. Davies has the last three digits, 170, of the Vocalion master in the wax, in addition to the Brunswick catalogue number 3855-B. Interestingly, Davies writes, "Displaying an amazing faith in the Post Office, Harry sent the disc over for examination." [6] The notes for the Classic Jazz Masters #25 album (see below) give the master as E-26752.

Tapes of *My Gal Sal* from the defective Canadian Br 4844 were circulated among Red Nichols's collectors in the 1960s, and one copy found its way in the first LP reissue of the tune in the 1969 Argentine album, Natchez WEP 805.



The second reissue of the tune was in the 1978 Classic Jazz Masters album (CJM 25), with notes written by Stan and Steve Hester. The legendary audio restorer John RT Davies did the transfer and remastering from the Canadian shellac (BR 4844), provided by Harry Avery.

The fact that at least one copy of Br 4844 is defective and plays *My Gal Sal* instead of *Five Pennies* seems to be known among record collectors and Red Nichols's fans, in part, because this was noted in the Rust and Laird discographies. However, what appears to be not as well known is the fact that some copies of US Br 3855 are also defective, this in spite of the fact that Stan and Steve Hester pointed out in the notes for CJM 25 that "copies exist with the labels reading MY GAL SAL/JAPANESE SANDMAN" and included an image of the defective Br 3855. The normal coupling on Br 3855 is, as for the Canadian counterpart Br 4844, *Five Pennies* and *Japanese Sandman*. However, some copies bear the label *My Gal Sal* instead of *Five Pennies*. Here is a scan of such a copy from Stan and Steve Hester's collection.

All copies of the defective Br 3855 with the *My Gal Sal* label actually play *Five Pennies*. There is no known copy that plays *My Gal Sal*.

It would seem that the two errors pointed out above in pressing records and printing labels are coupled. The defective copies of Canadian BR 4844 are correctly labeled on both sides, but the *Five Pennies* side was incorrectly pressed with a stamper for *My Gal Sal*. Conversely, the defective copies of US BR 3855 are correctly pressed on both sides, but the side pressed with the *Five Pennies* stamper is incorrectly labeled *My Gal Sal* on some copies of the record. It is also apparent that *My Gal Sal* was nearly ready to be issued since stampers and labels had been fabricated.

Acknowledgements. I am grateful to Steve Hester, Han Enderman, Nick Dellow and Keith Miller for helpful discussions. Linda Fitak deserves special thanks: she was very generous in providing information about CJM 25.

[1] *Billboard*, Vol. 61, No. 5, Jan 29, 1949.

[2] bixography.com/Venables/RalphVenablesPage.html

I am grateful to Russell Barnes for kindly sending a scan of the letter and permission to post it.

[3] Curiously, on-line discographies of Brunswick records list 4844 as *My Gal Sal* (E-26752) / *The Japanese Sandman* (E-26695): 78discography.com/BRN4500.htm and freewebs.com/vitaphone1/brunswick4500.html

[4] *Jazz and Ragtime Records 1897-1942*, by Brian Rust, Mainspring Press, Denver, CO, 2002,

[5] *Brunswick Records, A Discography of Recordings, 1916-1931, Volume 2: New York Sessions, 1927-1931*, by Ross Laird, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2001.

[6] Between August 1978 - February 1979, John RT Davies wrote a series of articles titled *Reminting the Pennies* in the jazz magazine *Storyville*.