

COLUMBIA RECORDS C SERIES, 1908-1923

A draft numerical list, including all known releases

by Dick Spottswood

As soon as phonographs and records became widely available in the 1890s, manufacturers sought to expand their markets around the globe. Recording teams and agents traveled across the Euro-Asian continents to create wholesale and retail outlets for their products, and to capture local and regional music that attracted customers. American companies were slower to expand, since English-language records produced in New York could be sold across the continent. Even so, demand for foreign language records existed from the beginning, starting with immigrant audiences around the city itself and extending to areas throughout the nation where other tongues were spoken. Columbia Records' E Series included European and Near Eastern languages. A parallel C Series served the Spanish-language market from the southwestern U.S. to the rest of the western hemisphere. It lasted from 1908 to 1923, and was replaced by a 2000-X series that ended with 6705-X in 1951.

Zonophone engineers from England were in Buenos Aires in 1902, producing records locally sold on a Royal label that were likely the earliest (at least in disc form) produced on the continent. By American Zonophone, owned by Victor, was first to record in Havana, producing over eighty titles by Pablo Valenzuela's popular *danzón* orchestra in 1905. Edison and Columbia came to Havana in 1906, and Victor followed in 1907. Columbia and Victor returned in 1909 and from time to time during the decades that followed. Some popular artists sailed to New York for additional sessions when demand for their records increased.

Columbia reportedly visited Mexico City in 1903, followed by Edison (1904) and Victor (1905). Edison returned annually from 1907-09. Victor came in July 1905, July 1907 and November-December 1910. Afterwards, Mexico's revolution curtailed recording there for more than a decade. Victor returned in November 1926 and came periodically thereafter. Columbia revisited Mexico City in 1905, 1907 and 1910. Later dates haven't survived, so when (and even if) Columbia recorded again in Mexico before 1947 (when Discos Columbia de México was launched) isn't clear.

B and BO series were created for Brazil and there was an Argentine T series, but information on their contents is hard to come by. An L series was created exclusively for records by Lovey's Band of Trinidad, whose approximately 57 releases were recorded in New York in 1912 and Port-of-Spain in 1914. A P1 -

P91 series was created solely for Peruvian discs by the vocal duet Montes y Manrique in 1911.

Columbia's C Series for the broader Spanish market began in the fall of 1908 when the company issued its first *discos dobles*, two-sided pressings that replaced single-siders that had been the industry norm until then. New ten-inch discs were numbered from C1 - C999 and C2000 - C4238. Twelve-inch discs were numbered from C1000 to C1310.

This list is an attempt to document each published record, with information derived from my *Ethnic Music on Records* (University of Illinois, 1990), Tim Brooks' and Brian Rust's *Columbia Master Book Discography* (Greenwood Press, 1999), Cristóbal Díaz Ayala's *Cuba canta y baila: Discografía de la música cubana, volume 1: 1898-1925* (Fundación Musicalia, 1994), the Arhoolie Foundation's *Strachwitz Frontera Collection* website, and numerous 1910s Columbia catalogs generously loaned by Steve Smolian of Backnumber Records. Special thanks to Andy Moyer for a detailed account of the *Rigoletto* sequence (C1288 -C1304), an early attempt at putting a complete opera on records. Jim Cartwright (of Immortal Performances Inc. in Austin, Texas) supplied more data from ten-inch operatics, and corrected information already here.

Sketchy evidence suggests a tentative sequence of numbers assigned to Spanish-language matrix groups. Columbia created a number of them, and the logic of their assignment isn't always obvious.

5350-5450	Mexico City, 1904-5
5451-5650	Mexico City, 1905-6
5651-5726	New York City, 1906-7
5771-5999	Mexico City, 1908
13500-13833	Mexico City, 1908-10
13850-14051	Mexico-oriented material, mid-1910s, location(s) uncertain
21351-21550	Montes y Manrique (Peru), in New York, October 1911 (other artists in this block are untraced)
21551-21899	Spanish language, New York City, November 1911 - ca. August 1915
37500-37899	Havana, 1906-10
37900-37999	Havana, ca. 1913
38000-38099	Havana, 1900s-1910s (12-inch)
48000-48399	Havana, 1913-6
48400-48499	Havana, 1916-December 1917
55000-55999	Buenos Aires and/or New York City, 1905-1911
82000-82399	Havana and NYC, December 1917-1918
83000-83080	Havana (and New York?), 1910s-1928 (12-inch)
82400-82799	New York City (etc.?), 1919

82800-93184	New York City (etc.), 1920
93185-93380	New York City (etc.), 1921-2
93381-93500	New York City (etc.), 1923

Actual recording dates are few and far between, and the rest are speculative in varying degrees, so please don't cite my guesses as fact. You'll also notice that I've listed them in an inconsistent fashion. Entering dates on spread sheets unavoidably triggers the software's calculator function that I've had to work around in various ways. Fortunately, online publication makes updates easy. So, if the problem's solvable and if you spot text errors and/or omissions, let me know and I'll be pleased to fix them. Other feedback is welcome too.

Dick Spottswood
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