ABSTRACT: When W. K. L. Dickson walked up to the recording horn with his violin sometime in 1894 or 1895 to perform in the earliest known surviving sound film, he played two excerpts from the 1877 French operetta *Les Cloches de Corneville* (The Chimes of Normandy) by Jean Robert Planquette. Two male employees danced to these very popular pieces of music from an enormously popular entertainment in what might be called the first music video. This essay unpacks this historic pairing of popular music and moving images to see what it can tell us about the role of popular music in the invention of motion pictures.

KEYWORDS: W. K. L. Dickson, Thomas Edison, *Chimes of Normandy*, *Dickson Experimental Sound Film*, sound film, popular music and film

When W. K. L. Dickson walked up to the recording horn with his violin sometime between September 1894 and April 1895 to perform in an experimental sound film,¹ he played popular music: two excerpts from Jean Robert Planquette’s 1877 French comic opera known in the US as *Chimes of Normandy*.² Two men dance to the right and slightly in front of Dickson in the frame. Dickson’s performance barely qualifies as accompaniment. In some sense, it is the images that accompany the music, like contemporary music videos of which Dickson’s film may well be the first. The *Dickson Experimental Sound Film*, as it is known today, has been available as a sound film only since 1998 when advances in recording technologies permitted a reconstruction of its soundtrack as well as its image track. Its existence as an artifact in film history has thus been relatively short, and its significance to film history has yet to be fully explored.

The *Dickson Experimental Sound Film* has been read in a variety of contexts: as the first sound film; as the first gay film; as an illustration of nineteenth-century male homosocial space; and as a documentary record of early filmmaking at Edison. I am interested in what music might have to contribute to an understanding of the film, specifically Dickson’s pairing of popular music
with moving images. Several questions present themselves for investigation here: What role did music, and specifically popular music, play in the genesis of Dickson’s film? How do Dickson’s particular selections and the source text from which they are drawn shed light on his experiment? What constituted popular music in America in 1895? Given that Dickson was working to link the phonograph and the kinetograph, what role did the phonograph play in the definition, reception, and dissemination of music in America? What role did popular music play, specifically, in the development of the phonograph? Ultimately, I read Dickson’s film as both an early example of the synchrony that would develop between the motion picture and recording industries and a window into popular music’s role in the emergence of modern entertainment culture.

**OPERA AS POPULAR MUSIC**

From the perspective of the twentieth-first century, Dickson may not seem to be playing popular music. Lawrence W. Levine has compellingly demonstrated that in the nineteenth century, Americans “shared a public culture less hierarchically organized, less fragmented into relatively rigid adjectival boxes that their descendants were to experience a century later.” What we would now term classical music, like opera, was popular music then. While opera may have served different purposes for different social classes, it was immensely popular across a wide swath of American society and in a variety of ways throughout the nineteenth century. Excerpts from opera were routinely interpolated into plays and included in popular entertainments such as vaudeville. Parodies of opera even made the minstrel stage. The first American opera company was in New Orleans, not New York. San Francisco boasted several theaters presenting operas to audiences of gold prospectors in the mid-1800s. Touring companies presented full-length operas, typically in English, in cities across the country. Opera stars, like Jenny Lind, toured to packed houses, and none other than P. T. Barnum of circus fame managed her tour. Operatic arias, choruses, and overtures provided the basis of many a popular song; bands routinely played instrumental versions of operatic selections; and the music publishing industry put it all into print. It is during this era that Richard Wagner’s Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin* became a popular processional for weddings. As Levine sums up, “It is hard to exaggerate the ubiquity of operatic music in nineteenth-century America.”

**CHIMES OF NORMANDY AS POPULAR MUSIC**

*Chimes of Normandy* underscores Levine’s claim. It was an enormously popular English-language version of *Les Cloches de Corneville*, itself a popular French comic opera that debuted in Paris in 1877 and ran for over four hundred
Fig. 1: An advertisement for a "speaking phonograph" demonstration.
performances, one of the best-loved comic operas in the history of the French stage. As a comic opera, it was closer to operetta than to grand opera, and it outperformed the most successful operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan in London, their home turf. *Chimes of Normandy* broke the record for the longest-running show in London’s West End (705 performances), a distinction it held for over ten years, outpacing *The Mikado, Patience, H.M.S. Pinafore*, and *The Gondoliers*. *Chimes of Normandy* opened in New York in the same year it opened in Paris and was revived successfully at least twice in New York in the nineteenth century alone. Kurt Ganzl in the venerable *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* describes the score as one hit after another.5 To this day, the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress catalog musical selections from *Chimes of Normandy* as popular song.

Before the advent of recordings and well into the twentieth century, printed sheet music proved the most viable method for commercializing a musical property. (The balance did not shift until the 1950s.) Beginning in 1878, numerous music publishers issued *Chimes of Normandy*, both as collections of songs and instrumental arrangements of those songs, including for violin and piano. Both professional and amateur musicians alike played this music in the music hall, the concert hall, and the parlor. It was published as a full vocal score of 230 pages in 1878 as *The Bells of Corneville*, complete with “original dialogue and stage business,”6 giving rise to numerous productions across the country (fig. 1).

THE NORTH AMERICAN PHONOGRAPH COMPANY AND POPULAR MUSIC

In the 1890s the embryonic recording industry was establishing itself as one of the prime movers of an emergent entertainment culture based in mechanical reproduction (player pianos and motion pictures, of course, being others). As phonography was coming into being in the late 1880s and 1890s, the shared musical culture of the nineteenth century was very much in evidence throughout the recording industry and specifically at the North American Phonograph Company, the first of several iterations of Edison recording companies. The earliest recording logs from 1889 and later catalogs starting in 1890 featured what we would now term classical music—symphonic overtures and operatic selections—along with minstrel tunes, ragtime, ethnic songs, parlor ballads, and Tin Pan Alley, a label applied to music produced for the American entertainment industry by professional songwriters in New York.7 In the summer of 1889, “Cricket Polka,” “Berlin Polka,” “Ave Maria,” “Rock of Ages,” “Dancing in the Barn,” “Frolices [sic] in a Boat House,” “Yankee Doodle,” “Semper Fidelis March,” “Southern Airs Medley,” “Minstrel’s Sweetheart Polka,” “Massa’s in de
Cold Ground,” and Spanish, Polish, German, and Irish songs appeared in the recording log along with Johann Strauss Jr.’s “Artist’s Life” and “Blue Danube” waltzes; von Suppé’s Poet and Peasant Overture; Mendelssohn’s “Wedding March”; overtures from Rossini’s opera Semiramide, Verdi’s Rigoletto, and Gounod’s Faust; and marches from Wagner’s Lohengrin and Meyerbeer’s Le Prophète. William Howland Kenney settles on the term pluralistic to describe the diversity of musical styles on offer in the early recording industry.8

Technology impacted the choice of music suitable for recording. Full-scale symphonic and operatic selections could not be entirely captured with the limitations of the medium. A single recording horn could not adequately record large groups of instruments, like an orchestra. Strings, the workhorse of the symphony orchestra, didn’t record well. Rather, the brasses and woodwinds fell within the limited tonal spectrum of early recording and sounded best. The short running times of early cylinders, the commercial recording medium at Edison, also militated against symphonic selections.9 Opera presented additional problems. Fidelity was elusive, and singers did not want the public to think that the thin and squeaky-sounding voices captured by early recording technology represented their actual voices.10 Early recording technology was calibrated to favor the middle registers of the male voice, so the high notes of sopranos could be distorted. Further, there was no way to mass-produce records efficiently. Multiple copies required multiple recording sessions and a huge investment of time, something opera singers resisted.11 The 1890s was a golden age for opera in America, yet as Andre Millard notes, “the great stars refused to sing into the horn of the phonograph.”12

The technology of early phonography certainly restricted the kinds of recordings that could be made but ultimately did not determine them. Edison was invested in recording symphonic music and opera because there was profit in doing so. The company created work-arounds, adapting and downsizing the standard symphony and operatic orchestra for the recording horn. The brass band proved a particularly efficient vehicle for this purpose with its preponderance of brass and woodwinds. Solo instrumentalists and small ensembles, often featuring woodwinds, were also recruited to play a variety of different types of music from opera to minstrel songs. There were cornet, clarinet, and flute soloists followed by piano and xylophone soloists; there were flute, clarinet, and bassoon ensembles, and piano with various woodwinds and brasses, including a recording of piano and saxophone by a pioneering female saxophonist Bessie Meeklens in 1892. Selections from Chimes of Normandy began appearing in Edison catalogs in 1896, and over twenty-two separate recordings of selections from the opera can be found in the Edison catalogs alone.13
Problems in recording opera singers, however, remained. Thus, the first vocalists to record at Edison were not opera singers but a “vocal quartet,” who recorded ten “Negro Melodies” and “popular songs” in 1890. The following year, George W. Johnson recorded “The Whistling Coon,” a popular minstrel tune that featured his virtuosic whistling, and “The Laughing Song,” Johnson’s own composition that Tim Brooks maintains was “probably the best selling record of the 1890s.” Irish American tenor George Gaskin recorded sixteen songs: religious hymns, Irish ballads, Tin Pan Alley songs, and nary a one derived from opera. It would prove far cheaper and easier to record these lesser-known artists, performers looking for a break in the highly competitive New York entertainment marketplace, who didn’t mind sacrificing vocal quality, were not bothered by the negative associations of arcade culture where early phonographs were heard, and were willing to invest the time to make multiple recordings. Publicity claimed that by 1894 Johnson had made 25,000 copies of his two signature songs. (And Johnson was paid by the recording!) Dan W. Quinn, an ironworker moonlighting as a singer, and Ada Jones, an aspiring Broadway singer and likely the first female vocalist to be recorded, specialized in ragtime and comic songs. These performers became the first recording stars, and their repertoire was comprised of minstrel tunes, ethnic music, ragtime, Tin Pan Alley, and comic songs, some...
of which contained mildly risqué but nonetheless sexual content, such as Ada Jones’s hits, “All She Gets from the Iceman Is Ice” and “Put on Your Slippers, You’re in for the Night” (fig. 2).

By the dawn of the twentieth century, several technological advances converged with economic and social forces to make opera one of the most popular forms of recorded music in America. Wax cylinders were replaced
longer-playing shellac discs (the old 78s), allowing for extended play (at
other recording companies first; Edison was slow to transition); recording
techniques were improved by expanding the tonal spectrum and capturing
more of the texture of the voice; surface noise was reduced; and reliable mass
production was introduced. The economic effects of the Great Depression of
the 1890s were largely dissipated by the end of the century, and the phono-
graph became affordable. Its price in 1888 was $150; whereas by 1900, it was
$7.50. Initially, phonographs were not marketed directly to the individual
consumer—that would come later. Cylinders were available only through
licensed agents who sold to exhibitors. To hear a phonograph cylinder, a per-
son went to an arcade. At the turn of the century, the social stigma attached
to the phonograph from its association with the arcade and the content of
some of its material was addressed through aggressive marketing, using
women in advertisements and repositioning the phonograph as purveyor of “the
giant domain of great music . . . envelop[ing] the American home in an aura of
uplifting art.” 18 The market exploded and the phonograph entered the parlor.
And when it did so, opera was there (fig. 3).

CARUSO, THE END OF OPERA, AND THE NEW POPULAR MUSIC

Enrico Caruso, an Italian opera singer unknown in the US but beginning
to make an impression in Europe, lent his voice to a series of opera record-
ings beginning in 1904. Caruso’s male tenor voice sat right in the middle of
phonography’s optimal recording range, and his expressive style of delivery,
more emotional than many other singers, proved hugely profitable. The first
million-selling recording was Caruso’s. It made him a small fortune and estab-
lished his reputation in America, garnering him his first contract at the Met-
ropolitan Opera. Record companies sought out opera singers who were now
more than willing to sign on; huge stars like the Nellie Melba, Adelina Patti, and
Francesco Tamagno lent their voices to recordings.

The Victor Talking Machine Company, Edison’s major competitor in the
phonograph business, issued the million-selling Caruso recording. Slow to react
to the economic potential of opera singers as recording stars, Edison, who chose
the repertoire for his company himself, balked, claiming “I propose to depend
upon the quality of the records and not on the reputation of the singers” (empha-
sis in original). Further, Edison’s company had made a hefty profit by recording
unknown performers in the 1890s, so Edison didn’t feel the need to engage estab-
lished opera stars. He would do something similar with symphony orchestras,
instituting an in-house Edison Symphony to record symphonic music rather
than contract (and pay for) marquee orchestras. Victor took advantage of the
situation, outpacing Edison by recruiting and aggressively marketing stars, and
especially Caruso, through what John and Susan Edwards Harvith describe as “one of the most stupendous mass advertising campaigns the United States had ever seen.” By the time Edison recognized the new celebrity culture in the recording industry and tried to sign big-name opera stars, Victor had already bested him. It was the beginning of the end for the Edison recording division.

Caruso represented the last gasp of opera’s popularity in mass culture. In the twentieth century, the shared musical culture in America would break down, replaced by forms of entertainment bifurcated along class lines: elite high culture and popular mass culture, which Levine points out were increasingly known by the terms *highbrow* and *lowbrow*. Even in academia these terms have endured remarkably well. The recording industry would capitalize, literally, on this seismic shift, differentiating products along class lines by marketing minstrelsy, vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley, and ethnic songs to immigrant, lower, and working classes, and sentimental parlor ballads, symphonic music, and opera to the middle classes. So-called good music would be distinguished from popular music.

By the 1910s, music produced in America’s urban enclaves would become the new popular music. In 1917, the Original Dixieland Jass [sic] Band produced a million-selling record. By the 1920s, opera and concert-hall music had been relegated to the margins. By 1929, Edison closed its recording division. Recording historian Michael Chanan notes: “the industry quickly learned . . . to transform the ‘raw’ music of urban and ethnic popular culture into formulaic commodities of mass consumption . . . . What followed was an explosion of new popular musical forms, styles, and voices, in which music that was originally marginal ended up by transforming the mainstream.” The term *lowbrow* would cling to this music for the rest of the century.

**MOTION PICTURES AND MUSICAL CULTURE**

When Dickson walked up to the recording horn in 1894 or 1895, opera was still popular music and not yet the highbrow music it would become; likewise, amateur musicians such as Dickson were still an integral part of the nation’s musical life, not yet replaced by the professional musicians who would increasingly dominate the production of music in the twentieth century. Further, musical culture was still largely constituted by live performance and not yet replaced by the experience of music as a commercially produced and mechanically reproduced commodity, “music without musicians.” The commodification of musical culture was not “an instantaneous occurrence,” and Dickson was still a decade or two away from the “radical and extraordinary” change that David Suisman describes as a revolution “produced by the spatial and temporal separation between the production of music and its consumption.” Dickson’s experiment

KATHRYN KALINAK | THE DICKSON EXPERIMENTAL SOUND FILM
in combining moving imagery with recorded sound reflects the shared musical culture of the nineteenth century as it anticipates, indeed participates in, the commodification of music in the twentieth.

THE PHONOGRAPH: AN APT STARTING POINT

The development of motion pictures at Edison followed a trajectory similar to the prior development of the phonograph. As many early film historians have noted, the phonograph and the motion picture were linked. In an early kind of synchrony, Edison inaugurated experiments in moving images, and put Dickson in charge of them, to create a new device incorporating the phonograph in order to spur phonograph sales, what Dickson described as the “synchronous attachment of photography with the phonograph.”24 Dickson initially employed the mechanics of the phonograph to produce moving images, combining Eadweard Muybridge’s zoopraxiscope, in essence a drum-like cylinder, and “the ordinary phonograph cylinder,” which, when placed side by side would play “synchronously.”25 It did not work and the project along with the apparatus was “regretfully abandoned.”26 By 1889, Dickson claimed to have developed a working kineto-phonograph physically linking the phonograph and the kinetograph and described a talking film he produced for Edison’s return from Paris in which he said: “Good morning, Mr. Edison, glad to see you back. I hope you are satisfied with the kineto-phonograph.” Scholars have largely discounted Dickson’s account.27 But the key point here is that Dickson describes a talking film that captures the spoken word.

Dickson’s thinking about the kineto-phonograph at this early stage paralleled Edison’s about the phonograph; both were devices to reproduce the spoken word.28 Edison’s vision for the phonograph would be radically altered between 1878, the year Edison patented the phonograph, and 1894–95 when Dickson made his film, and music would be at the center of that transformation (fig. 4).

The same year Edison patented his phonograph, he also founded the Edison Speaking Phonograph Company. Like his rivals, Edison developed the phonograph as a device to record the human voice, borrowing the term phonograph from the Greek for voice writer. Demonstrations were organized to drum up public enthusiasm and create a market for the apparatus: “Edison’s Phonograph—Talks, Laughs, Sings.”29 Publicity proclaimed, “It will clearly and accurately repeat whatever may be said into it.”30 Exhibitions featured recorded lectures and oratories with live recordings made of local dignitaries and audience members. Lisa Gitelman’s work on these early exhibitions reveals that audiences reacted in a way typical of first encounters with new media: they were “both enthusiastic and skeptical.”31 Edison forged ahead, laying the groundwork
Fig. 4: The cover of the sheet music for George Johnson’s hit, “The Laughing Song.” Note that his race is clearly visible, perhaps even a draw, at this early stage of the recording industry.
Fig. 5: Advertisements turned to women to address the phonograph’s stigma.

for the commercial exploitation of the phonograph almost a decade later. As late as 1895, the reproduction of the human voice was still evident in Edison promotional materials (fig. 5).
But for Edison the phonograph’s greatest economic potential was as a business machine that could increase efficiency and lower costs. Phonographs could eliminate the need for live dictation and the inaccuracy that went with it. Memos and correspondence could be delivered on cylinders, Edison’s early recording medium, without ever being transcribed. In fact, Edison himself used the phonograph in this capacity in his own company. Early adopters of the phonograph used the device for similar purposes. In Bram Stoker’s Dracula, published in 1897, Dr. Seward’s diary is “kept in phonograph” and transcribed by Mina, the novel’s de facto narrator. But the timing wasn’t right. Technology in the office was a novelty—people were still getting used to the typewriter. The machinery was not always reliable and could be hard to operate, stenographers and typists objected, and the dictation phonograph was slow to catch on as a business machine. (It would be well into the twentieth century before it did.) In the meantime, the reproduction of music filled the void and played a critical role in the phonograph’s success.

Edison himself initially resisted the use of the phonograph for entertainment but with disappointing business sales and as yet nonexistent home market, he relented. The primary market for the phonograph would be relocated from the corporate world to the emergent entertainment culture. Enterprising exhibitors led the way, and the phonograph’s development played out along two separate lines. First were phonograph concerts, which now included recorded music along with the recorded speeches, lectures, and sermons, that were experienced communally by audiences in church halls and community centers. Second were the coin-operated phonographs found in arcades and designed to provide short phonographic recordings to individual listeners for a nickel, which as early film historian Charles Musser points out, are “forms of presentation that paralleled projection and… [various] peephole devices.” The enterprising exhibitor Lyman Howe specialized in phonograph concerts comprised entirely of music. But the arcade machines proved more profitable. It is hard not to agree with Musser when he points out that “when Edison sought to extend his phonograph into the visual realm, [he] developed a method of exhibition modeled after the arcade machine—the peephole kinetoscope.”

**“SONG OF THE CABIN BOY” AND “I’M A ROVER OF THE SEA”**

Sometime during the period from September 1894 to April 2, 1895, when Dickson resigned from Edison’s employ, he had a working kineto-phonograph and made an experimental film in which he appeared playing the violin. Recording technology required that Dickson stand next to the recording horn to ensure that the sound of his playing could be captured. Thus viewers see Dickson producing the very sound that is heard—popular music. Although the music he
plays has been widely identified as “Song of the Cabin Boy,” he actually played two pieces from Chimes of Normandy: “Song of the Cabin Boy” and a portion of a second tune, “I’m a Rover of the Sea” (a.k.a. “Waltz from the Chimes of Normandy”), which is incomplete in surviving copies of the film. Only the first two phrases of the melody are heard before the film abruptly ends.

Fig. 6: “Song of the Cabin Boy” from the W. F. Shaw arrangement.
At least two selections of music from *Chimes of Normandy* arranged for violin and piano were published in 1879, one by noted music publisher Carl Fisher and one by W. F. Shaw. These arrangements, and there may have been others like them, would have given Dickson easy access to a violin solo. I suspect that Dickson used the Shaw edition. Here, “Song of the Cabin Boy” is followed

![Sheet music](image-url)
by “I’m a Rover of the Sea,” just as Dickson would play them into the recording horn, even though these songs do not follow each other in the opera, and other *Chimes of Normandy* collections, including the Carl Fisher, do not position these two numbers back-to-back (figs. 6 and 7).

According to his biographer Paul Spehr, Dickson was a very good amateur violinist, having “inherited musical talent, apparently from his mother.” As an amateur musician in nineteenth-century America, he had ample opportunities to perform publicly and appeared in concerts in both New Jersey and Virginia. Dickson could have tried out a number of other musical selections that day before settling on “Song of the Cabin Boy” and “I’m a Rover of the Sea” but evidence points to the opposite: that he came in ready to play these particular pieces.

**THE MURCH SCHMIDLIN RECONSTRUCTION**

The first re-recording of the original wax cylinder of Dickson’s playing was made in 1998 at the lab of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archive of Recorded Sound at the New York Public Library for a world premiere at the Domitor Conference that same year where the image track and soundtrack of the *Dickson Experimental Sound Film* were synchronized live for a one-time only event. George Lucas funded the work done by Walter Murch, the sound designer, and Rick Schmidlin, a producer at Industrial Light and Magic and Skywalker Sound, to improve the audibility and synchronize sound to image. This version is available on a website designed specifically to showcase their work and is included in several collections of early film. The original cylinder recording, however, is two minutes and fifty-six seconds and the Murch Schmidlin recording, like the Rodgers and Hammerstein recording, restored only the last thirty seconds or so, roughly the portion that corresponds to the image track.

**THE IRENE RECORDING**

Since then, a new recording has been made in 2012 using the IRENE system that converts photographic images of audio grooves into sound, producing a three-dimensional map of the surface of the recording. This has allowed some of the previously inaudible portions of the cylinder to be recovered, revealing that there were four separate takes that day, thus providing opportunities for Dickson to run through other options. The evidence points to the conclusion that he didn’t. The latest generation IRENE recording is not completely audible, but it is possible to distinguish four separate takes of a violin playing. The first take is at extremely low volume and difficult to hear; the second is more audible and “Song of the Cabin Boy” and “I’m a Rover of the Sea” are identifiable, although not in their entirety, because this part of the cylinder is badly
damaged; the third and fourth takes are fully audible and “Song of the Cabin Boy” is followed by “I’m a Rover of the Sea.” Enough of the first take is audible to determine that it is a violin playing and that it is the same length as the other takes. I am convinced that if the audibility issue can be solved, future recordings will reveal that Dickson is playing “Song of the Cabin Boy” and “I’m a Rover of the Sea” in all four takes on the recording.

“Song of the Cabin Boy” is a barcarolle, a boatman’s song, a musical form derived from the folk songs of Venetian boatmen. Planquette precedes Jacques Offenbach here whose more famous barcarolle was composed in 1881 for Les Contes d’Hoffmann (The Tales of Hoffmann). Planquette’s barcarolle was written in 6/8 meter as was typical of the form, and thus easy enough to waltz to. “I’m a Rover of the Sea,” is a “valse rondo,” composed, obviously, in waltz time. A male same-sex couple dances to the music Dickson plays, and their performance was not spontaneous or impromptu. The Murch Schmidlin reconstruction not only improved the audibility of Dickson’s violin performance, it recovered his vocal directive to the crew immediately preceding the fourth and final version of the performance: “Are the rest of you ready? Go ahead.” This has led many, including myself, to conclude that the dancing of the men was not impromptu or spontaneous but planned and rehearsed. They were in the frame to begin with, already dancing when the film starts. And since there were four takes on the original cylinder recording, the men had opportunity to practice their dancing. On to the dancing.

THE HOMOSOCIAL WORLD OF EDISON

An oft-noted aspect of the Dickson Experimental Sound Film is those two men waltzing to Dickson’s performance. In the documentary The Celluloid Closet, based on the work of Vito Russo on the representation of homosexuality in film, the Dickson film appears twice, both without voice-over commentary, as it speaks for itself. In fact, before the soundtrack was discovered and restored, the film had been known as The Gay Brothers. Russo includes a still from the film under that title in his book. Scott Simmon writes that the dancing men lent this film the reputation of being “the first gay film,” although he adds, “the dancers’ gender may be more a reflection of that of the workers in Edison’s lab” (fig. 8).

Of this point Charles Musser has written, “The earliest Edison films were shot in the male, homosocial world of the Edison Laboratory. When Dickson and Heise [the cameraman on the experimental sound film] began to create imaginary spaces that were both located in and counterparts to the Edison Laboratory, they chose spaces that men exclusively occupied.” For Musser, “women were not so much excluded from these earliest Edison films; they were
simply not present in the larger space from which casts were drawn."50 Those male employees were pressed into service to dance to Dickson’s tune because there were no women available. That seems an imminently logical conclusion to draw here. I draw the same one. And yet Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin in *Queer Cinema* point out that “without a narrative context, the meaning of ‘two men dancing for the camera’ is left open to interpretation.”51 Indeed.

**OPEN TO INTERPRETATION**

I read the two songs that Dickson chose, as well as the source material from which they are drawn, as motivating texts for the narrative context of two men dancing. *Chimes of Normandy* revolves around mistaken identity, the restrictions of social class, and the power of true love to conquer both. An annual market fair in Act 1, where both songs appear, allows couples to meet across class lines, subsequently to spend the rest of the opera trying to transcend them. It seems highly likely that Planquette was influenced by one of the grandest of French grand operas, Charles Gounod’s *Faust*, which premiered in 1859 and famously features an annual fair, the Kermesse. Villagers sing lively choruses; lovers meet; and principals introduce themselves through their arias, including a beautifully melodic piece sung by Valentin, a young and handsome soldier, and

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**Fig. 8:** A still from the *Dickson Experimental Sound Film.*
a boisterous aria, sung by the villain, in waltz rhythm, which rouses the villagers to dance. Here was a template for Planquette. Among the highlights of the market fair in *Chimes of Normandy*: lovers meet; villagers join in on the spirited chorus “Legend of the Bells”; a young and handsome fisherman sings “The Song of the Cabin Boy”; and a marquis disguised as a sea captain sings the waltz, “I’m a Rover of the Sea” which recounts the many ways he is a rover.

Both musical numbers performed by Dickson were sung by men in *Chimes of Normandy* and both describe and even extol the virtues of the homosocial world. More than one version of English lyrics was available in the nineteenth century depending upon the publisher. This was typical of publishing practices of the era when a new translation would help publishers differentiate and sell their product. The Oliver Ditson company of Boston, for instance, had already published a collection from *Chimes of Normandy* when they brought out a second edition the same year endorsed by and promoting the English Hess Opera Company, which used their own translation. Thus, different translations of the songs were available as early as 1878. There are, however, common elements across the translations. In “Song of the Cabin Boy,” the handsome fisherman, Grenicheaux (Robin More in some translations) sings of the circumscribed and lonely world of the cabin boy out on the huge expanse of the ocean on a ship populated only by men. There is no one to cherish him in this world, no soft pillow to lay his head upon, and danger is ever present. These somewhat maudlin sentiments, however, are offset with a contrasting middle section introduced by a *ritardando* (a slowing of the tempo) which signals its importance: a series of exhilarating musical leaps into the upper register of the tenor range in which the singer voices his near-ecstatic connection with and concern for the poor cabin boy, variously: “Go, go thou poor rover / Go then ocean wide sail over / Go, Go Go” and “Ah! Ah! May fav’ring gale / Ah! Ah! Still waft thy sail / Float on!, float on!” Other translations include similar exhortations. In the nineteenth century, such rhapsodic sentiments about the joys of the male world remained unexplored.

“I’m a Rover of the Sea” rejects conventional heterosexual marriage and celebrates the adventurous life aboard an all-male ship. In fact, it takes up where “Song of the Cabin Boy” leaves off. Henri, the sea captain nee marquis, sings of his life on the high seas, heedless of danger, afraid of nothing. With a girl in every port, he takes his pleasures where he finds them and laughs at love. Both the lure and the danger of femininity are voiced here by an aging bachelor who is ready to give up the game—if he can find a maiden beautiful enough to tempt him. Both Grenicheaux and Henri find true love and all ends well in a double wedding. Why then is the most memorable music sung by men and about men?
Dickson’s performance was not spontaneous or improvised and neither was the dancers’. But how aware were Dickson, the dancers, or the film crew of the content of those songs? Considering that this was very popular music at the time Dickson recorded it, experienced and enjoyed by an array of social classes, it seems likely that some of the men in front of or behind the camera might have heard of *Chimes of Normandy* and perhaps recognized the tunes. At the very least, Dickson would have known the titles since he played them and likely saw the titles on the G. F. Shaw violin and piano arrangement: “Song of the Cabin Boy” and “I’m a Rover of the Sea.” Those titles in and of themselves suggest the homosocial world embodied in the opera and rendered in its libretto.

Dickson’s film was not intended for commercial distribution. It was an in-house experiment, a cross-check on the equipment and product before moving the kineto-phonograph into the marketplace. Thus, on that day the employees in the early Edison studio known as the Black Maria would have had no expectation of anyone, other than Edison and their fellow employees, seeing these images. With the freedom to experiment not just with technology but with content, was there an element of play here in this masculine world of the Edison laboratory, a flouting of the boundaries of male homosociality, a swerve into the repressed, forbidden underworld of male-male desire, aided and abetted by two popular songs celebrating the male homosocial world? Did the dancers understand the transgressive nature of their performance? Is this why one of them is smiling so sheepishly?

**THE DICKSON EXPERIMENTAL SOUND FILM AS A DANCE FILM**

Dickson could have simply put himself in the center of the frame and run the experiment. But he was clearly looking for something else to fill the frame and a genre emerging at Edison at that time provided the material to do so—the dance film. Invited out to Edison’s plant in Orange, New Jersey, between 1894 and early 1895, all manner of dancers performed in the Black Maria: African American hoofers like James Grundy and the performing team of Joe Rastus, Denny Tolliver, and Walter Wilkins; so-called exotics like the Native Americans who performed the Sioux Ghost and Buffalo dances and the Japanese dancers with the Imperial Japanese dance; dancing couples like Bertha Waring and John Wilson; and the staple of the genre, the dancing girls. All of these kinetoscopes have not survived but all of them were produced by Dickson himself. It is not known exactly when Dickson made the experimental sound film in the period from September 1894 to April 2, 1895, but at least some or perhaps even all of the dance films I consider here would have been made before the experimental sound film. It is interesting to consider what they may have contributed to the context of Dickson’s sound film, providing a template of sorts.
The buck-and-wing dance performed by James Grundy was filmed sometime in January 1895. Grundy, important in the development of tap dance, left a visual record of his signature dances in several kinetoscopes recreating his performance in the musical review *The South before the War*. In the first of these, a buck-and-wing dance, Grundy, screen left, dances to the accompaniment of someone identified only as Flint, a harmonica player, screen right (fig. 9). In another dance film from October 1894, Joe Rastus, Denny Tolliver, and Walter Wilkins recreate a break dance from the musical review *The Passing Show*. Again, musicians and dancers appear together in the frame. There is a harmonica player frame right, a dancer center frame, and a third performer, frame left, who provides rhythm with his hands and feet. In these kinetoscopes, musicians and dancers share a homosocial space inhabited by male performers.

Another type of dance film featured a man and a woman dancing together as a couple. Bertha Waring and John Wilson, for instance, recreated their dance from the burlesque *Little Christopher Columbus* in December 1894. Earlier, in April 1894, an anonymous couple performed a Scottish highland dance. Wheeler Winston Dixon reads these couples films as a template for straightness: “the idealization of the heterosexual pairing of man and woman as a discreet social unit.”
Finally, some dance films feature female performers. The first women to appear in kinetoscopes in 1894 were dancers. Carmencita was filmed in March, Armand ‘Ary sometime between March and May; Annabelle danced the butterfly and serpentine dances in August; the Gaiety Girls performed a carnival dance and two of the troupe, Lucy Murray and May Lucas, performed solos in November; and Ruth St. Denis appeared in December of that year. French dancers were filmed in September almost certainly performing a can-can; in October Fatima was doing a “danse du ventre” or belly dance, and Mlle. Rose recorded an Oriental dance in November. These dance films presented often-eroticized imagery for the titillation of the (male) spectator: women with their arms and legs exposed, their hair loose, their costumes revealing. The dancing could be sensual, too, presenting types of dance outside the formal strictures of ballet or social dancing with which viewers would be familiar.

I read the *Dickson Experimental Sound Film* as a mash-up of these dance films, a combination of the male homosocial space shared by musicians and dancers in films featuring African American performers; the articulation of heterosexuality on display in the dancing couples films; and the erotic frisson of the dancing girls. Considered in this context, Dickson’s dance film is fraught with possibilities—a male homosocial space invaded by a heterosexual courtship ritual, the heterosexual couple replaced by a same-sex couple, and erotic titillation activated by the prospect of homosexuality. Situated in the imaginary space of the Black Maria, unmoored from narrative formulas, restricted by the personnel at hand, released from conventionality by its experimental nature, and siphoning off content from a popular opera and context from the emerging genre of the dance film, Dickson’s film is open to interpretation as a fantasy of the forbidden: male-male desire.

**THE KINETO-PHONOGRAPH ENTERS THE MARKETPLACE**

As a result of Dickson’s experiment, some forty-five kineto-phonograph machines were produced. An additional number of adaptors linking existing Edison kinetographs with phonographs were sold in the US, allowing owners to retrofit their machines for sound. Enterprising entrepreneurs also tried their hand at rigging up devices themselves. But the kineto-phonographs did not go into mass production and their number—manufactured, retrofitted, or jerry-rigged—was small. These viewing and listening machines did not synchronize sound and image, a process that would elude Edison for over a decade. Indeed, patrons of the kineto-phonograph in London remarked “that the synchronization of music and motion is still not perfected.”

The kineto-phonograph came into existence steeped in Edison’s belief that it could function as a democratizing force that would bring good music to
the homes of working people as well as the privileged elite. Edison would say in 1895: “thus, if one wished to hear and see the concert or the opera, it would only be necessary to sit down at home, look upon a screen, and see the performance, reproduced exactly in every movement and at the same time the voices of the players and singers, the music of the orchestra, the various sounds that accompany a performance of this sort, will be reproduced exactly.” Edison’s aim was nothing less than to “make good music an affordable consumer good.” It was a sentiment echoed by Dickson whose own vision of the kineto-phonograph resonated with the “rich strain of a Seidl or Damrosch orchestra, issuing from a concealed phonograph.” (Seidl and Damrosch were noted symphony conductors of the day, Seidl, a conductor at the Metropolitan Opera and the founder of his own orchestra and Damrosch, the founder of the New York Symphony.) But the kineto-phonograph didn’t support their vision of audiovisual operas and symphonies.

The kineto-phonograph system marketed in 1895 paired preexisting Edison kinetoscopes with preexisting Edison cylinder recordings, a fruition of the synchrony that Edison had earlier imagined. Thus, kineto-phonographs showed the dancing girls, burlesque and vaudeville acts, and New York entertainments that were being filmed in the Black Maria at the time, like James Grundy’s buck-and-wing dance, the Gaiety Girls’ carnival dance, and the finale to Act I and band drill from the burlesque The Milk White Flag. The coordinating list of cylinders was chosen to suit these performances and, not surprisingly, leans toward Tin Pan Alley, minstrel tunes, and ethnic music: “Linger Longer Lucy,” “Pomona Waltz,” “Continental March,” “Irish Reel,” “Fairies Dance,” “Jolly Darkies,” “Vienna Beauties Waltz,” “Sleigh Bells Galop [sic],” and “Sawdust and Spangles.” These titles were reported by Gordon Hendricks whose pioneering and important work in early film history can be frustratingly difficult to verify. But if Hendricks is correct, operas and symphonies were not on offer and what was available was quite the opposite of what Edison and Dickson had envisioned (fig. 10).

The situation in Europe was similar. Cylinders were not shipped to Europe from the US. Instead, suggestions were offered for appropriate cylinder recordings, a prototype of sorts for the cue sheet of the silent-film era, a list of musical compositions chosen to accompany a film. One of these documents has survived, in Italian, produced in 1896 by the Milan office of the Continental Commerce Co., Edison’s overseas agents. It identifies seventeen kinetoscopes for use in the kineto-phonograph and cylinder recordings appropriate to them. The kinetoscopes are largely dance films, performances by Carmencita, Annabelle, Princess Ali, Elsie Jones, the Gaiety Girls, James Grundy, Waring and Wilson, as well as Ena Bertoldi, the contortionist, and the cast of the The

KATHRYN KALINAK | THE DICKSON EXPERIMENTAL SOUND FILM
Fig. 10: A list of cylinder suggestions, in Italian, for Edison kinetoscopes from the Continental Commerce Company, Edison's overseas agents.

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<th>Films</th>
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<th>Musica</th>
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<td>Carmensita</td>
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<td>Alma-Danza Spagnuola</td>
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<td>Anna Bell, la Farfalla</td>
<td>Tobasco, Valse Mio</td>
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<td>Bertoldi, Contorsionista</td>
<td>Cav. Rusticana</td>
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<td>Danza Agile</td>
<td>Padrone Feming Valse</td>
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<td>Danza Pickainnies</td>
<td>Danza del ventaggio</td>
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<td>Barkies Tukle</td>
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<td>Piccolo Kenkies</td>
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<td>Rob Roy, danza Scozzese</td>
<td>Nulla troppo buono</td>
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<td>Giuocatore di Coltellini</td>
<td>Belle di New York,</td>
<td>Banda di Gilmore</td>
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<td>Marcia Cav. Rusticana</td>
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<td>Daino e ventaglio</td>
<td>Parkies Tukle</td>
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<td>Warring e Wilson</td>
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<td>Polka Eloisa</td>
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<td>Danza Carnevelesca (3 Danzatori)</td>
<td>Duetto Banjo</td>
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<td>Danza del ventaglio</td>
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<td>Lucy Murrag</td>
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<td>Indugia più a lungo,</td>
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<td>Danza di Brownies</td>
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<td>Marcia Arcadica</td>
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<td>Band Drill</td>
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<td>Marcia Liberty Bell</td>
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<td>Marcia Tommy Atkins</td>
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<td>Orchestra</td>
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<td>Trio, White Milk Ilag</td>
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<td>Danza del remo</td>
<td>Marcia di Nozze Africana (Dal Museo di Barnum e C.)</td>
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<td>Danza del Ventre</td>
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This one-page list was copied precisely (including typo’s) from a January 1896 Catalog of the Continental Phonograph Kinetoscope Co. of Milan, Italy. No speech synchronization was attempted, as all the cylinders above are musical selections.
Milk White Flag. The cylinders, like those distributed within the US, lean toward recordings appropriate for the popular entertainers featured in them: Tin Pan Alley, minstrel tunes, and ethnic music. But nestled among these titles are selections from Mascagni’s opera Cavalleria Rusticana, mentioned twice for two different films. It is a very small sample and I hesitate to extrapolate from it much about Edison, opera, and the kineto-phonograph other than to note that perhaps we see the seeds here of the future differentiation between Edison’s US and European markets, where recordings designated for European release, especially the Italian and German series beginning in 1901, were heavily weighted toward opera and symphonic selections. The lifespan of the kineto-phonograph was short, doomed by the same thing that ended kinetoscope production: the rise of large-screen projection.

Edison didn’t give up on opera, however. There is some evidence to suggest that there was a second kinetophone produced by March 1895 of an opera scene. According to Charles Musser, this film was listed by the Continental Commerce Co. and sold in Italy under the title Scene d’opera. It was not sold or distributed in the US, and Musser says that it “may not have been shot with synchronous sound firmly in mind.” By 1911, Edison’s company had produced an improved sound and image system incorporating large-screen projection for theatrical exhibition and produced an array of kinetophones drawn from vaudeville, minstrelsy, the legitimate stage, and opera. Among them are the sextext from Donizetti’s opera Lucia di Lammermoor, a scene from Gounod’s Faust, and the miser’s scene from The Chimes at Midnight.

CONCLUSION

Edison claimed that moving pictures would “do for the eye what the phonograph had done for the ear.” I would not describe his statement as misleading, but Edison’s claim elides the rich history of music’s relationship to the technological, economic, social, and cultural forces that shaped the emergence of modern entertainment culture. Popular music, as we conceive of it today, did not exist as a category of music in the nineteenth century. All music was potentially popular music—symphonies, operas, religious hymns, band music, minstrel songs, and ethnic folk music. This recasts Dickson’s film from an esoteric experiment featuring an elitist musical form to an entertainment exploiting a very popular piece of music. The Dickson Experimental Sound Film throws into high relief the relationship between popular music and moving images, a relationship that exists less audibly in any number of other films in the formative stages of motion-picture development such as the dance films that similarly depended upon popular music and featured performers dancing to music unheard by the viewer but not the performer. Music was central to the development of
filmmaking, and it may require some adjustment of our assumptions about how music was experienced in the nineteenth century to understand the connection.

Further, the Dickson Experimental Sound Film offers a window into the multiplicity of meanings that a film can have. Although the film was not commercially released, the Dickson Experimental Sound Film existed in conversation with a number of other films produced at Edison at the time, particularly the dance films that constituted a staple of the era. Drawing upon the aesthetics and ideological assumptions of dancing girls, dancing men, and dancing couples, Dickson’s film inverts the formula, with a same-sex male couple front and slightly off-center. Here is the forbidden, a moment when a group of men, never expecting their performance to be anything but ephemeral, gave expression to the repressed side of the homosocial world: same-sex desire. As Dixon points out, “cracks started to appear in the rigid structure of the heterocentric cinema even as it was being invented.” These fissures in heterocentric film were aided and abetted by Dickson’s choice of music, two popular songs whose lyrics celebrate the male homosocial world, a world both promoted and upended by moving pictures.

Notes

1. I am following Charles Musser’s authoritative dating of the film. He notes April 2, 1895, is the date when Dickson resigned from Edison’s employ. See Charles Musser, Edison Motion Pictures 1890–1900: An Annotated Filmography (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press; Germona, Italy: Giornate del cinema muto, 1997), 178.

2. The opera was published and recorded by multiple publishers and recording companies under both Chimes of Normandy and The Chimes of Normandy. I have chosen to use Chimes of Normandy throughout.


4. Levine, Highbrow, 98.


7. The earliest recordings at Edison were not cataloged but logged in account books as “Musical Cylinder Accounts” by “A. Theo. E. Wangemann” (Adelbert Theodor Edward), who functioned as recording engineer and studio manager. These records predate the first catalogs in 1890 and establish that Edison began production of cylinders on a regular basis in May 1889. See Allen Koenigsberg, Edison Cylinder Records 1889–1912 (New York: Stellar Publications, 1969), 111–33.

9. The running time of Edison cylinders was not standardized until the mid-1890s. Most were around two minutes but some were longer, three minutes, and at least some cylinders could run as long as five minutes, hence “Edison’s Five Minutes with the Minstrels,” a recording from 1891. Longer recording times were produced by manipulating the rpms (revolutions per minute). These variable rpms were similar to the variable projection speeds of early motion pictures.


11. There were attempts at duplication at Edison as early as 1890 although the systems were unreliable and quality varied considerably. See Koenigsberg, Edison Cylinder Records, xvii–xviii.

12. Millard, America on Record, 82.


14. The quartet was not identified in Edison records but almost certainly was the Manhasett Quartet featuring George Gaskin.


16. A “Miss Werner, Vocalist” was at Edison’s recording facility on January 10, 1890, but Wangemann’s records note “Experimenting, No Account Kept” and no cylinder of the event, if there ever was one, survives. Edison did hire young women in 1890 to record speech for Edison’s Talking Dolls, largely nursery rhymes. They were not vocalists, however. Ada Jones is a particularly interesting figure. A child actor, she found her career on Broadway stalled when she turned to adult roles in the early 1890s. Recording reignited her career, and she became, according to the Songwriter’s Hall of Fame, the most popular female singer of the pre-1920s era. Songwriters Hall of Fame website, n.d., songwritershalloffame.org/artists/C4031.


20. Harvith and Harvith, Edison, Musicians, 2.


23. Suisman, Selling Sounds, 9, 15.


25. Dickson and Dickson, History of the Kinetograph, 8.

26. Dickson and Dickson, 8.

27. Dickson and Dickson, 19. No physical record of such a film has survived, and scholars have generally been dismissive of Dickson’s claim. Rosalind Rogoff describes Dickson’s statements as “more wishful thinking than fact.” Rosalind Rogoff, “Edison’s Dream,” Cinema Journal 15, no. 2 (1976): 60.
Paul Spehr concedes that Dickson may have shown something to Edison on his return from Paris in October 1889 and that “it is possible that a recording with Dickson speaking accompanied the demonstration.” Spehr notes, however, Dickson’s “loose notions about the nature of truth and honesty.” Paul Spehr, *The Man Who Made Movies: W. K. L. Dickson* (New Barnet, UK: John Libbey; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 148–69, 2. Neil Baldwin points out that “Edison and Dickson’s rudimentary cylinder research at that early date” make it “unlikely that the demonstration, appealing as it sounds, could have occurred as early as claimed.” Neil Baldwin, *Edison: Inventing the Century* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 212. It is worth pointing out that Dickson maintained throughout his life, both privately and publicly, that 1889 was the date his experiments in motion pictures came to fruition in a talking film. This from a letter to Edison in 1914: “I well remember how we fought for it and got it—a projector, a positive strip of film, synchronizing (in addition) with your phonograph—all in early 1889. Can anyone beat that?” (emphasis in original). W. K. L. Dickson to Thomas Edison, 3 April 1914, Thomas A. Edison Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, http://edison.rutgers.edu (hereafter Edison Papers). As late as 1933, in an article for the *Journal of the Society for Motion Picture Engineers*, Dickson maintained that date. See W. K. L. Dickson, “A Brief History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and the Kineto-Phonograph,” *Journal of the Society for Motion Picture Engineers* 21 (1933): 447.

28. There was some correspondence concerning Edison displaying the kinetophone at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Edison, at this point, confirmed that “he had successfully shown it on the screen in connection with the phonograph.” But Edison declined to move forward with a public demonstration at this time because he “didn’t have time to perfect.” See George Milton Hopkins to Thomas Edison and Edison to Hopkins, 25 April 1893, Edison Papers. Shortly after this, Edison wrote to Alfred Tate, “First I want to see the model finished and pronounced OK by Dickson.” Thomas Edison to Alfred Tate, 2 May 1893, Edison Papers.


32. In a letter to Continental Commerce Co., the Edison company’s licensed agents worldwide, Edison pointed out that by using the phonograph combined with the kinetoscope, “the figures can be caused to speak or sing.” Edison to Continental Commerce, 9 May 1895, Edison Papers. And amid the Continental Commerce ballyhoo for the kinetoscope can be found this teaser for “a cunningly devised combination of the Phonograph with the kinetoscope (upon which Mr. Edison is now working) [which] will reproduce not only every gesture and expression, but each word and intonation . . . . [W]ho can estimate the satisfaction which would come could life and language be given to the great English statesmen . . . or the gratification . . . derived by future generations in hearing and seeing the great men of this day.” Continental Commerce Company catalog, in *Motion Picture Catalogs by American Producers and Distributors, 1884–1908*, ed. Charles Musser (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984–85), microfilm, Edison Papers.

33. There are several memos included in Edison’s papers that are phonograph transcriptions. See, for instance, Edison to Alfred Tate, memorandum, “phonograph dictation,” 2 May 1893, Edison Papers.


35. The dictation phonograph would eventually turn a profit and the machines were manufactured at Edison’s West Orange plant into the 1960s, outlasting Edison’s manufacture of phonograph recordings by decades.


38. To the best of my knowledge, Paul Morris, an English organist, first identified “Song of the Cabin Boy” and “With Joy My Heart” as the two songs from *Chimes of Normandy* that Dickson plays. My thanks to Jerry Fabris, head of recorded sound at the Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, New Jersey, for sharing his correspondence with Morris with me. I disagree with Morris, however, on his identification of the second song as “With Joy My Heart.” Although “With Joy My Heart” is in waltz time, as is “I'm a Rover of the Sea,” it is a quite different and separate melody. As I read the opera's score, “With Joy My Heart” functions as the prelude to ‘I'm a Rover of the Sea.’ It is not unlike a cabaletta in nineteenth-century Italian opera which served as the introduction to the lengthier and often more demanding aria. It is not “With Joy My Heart” that Dickson plays but a short snatch of “I'm a Rover of the Sea.”

39. Selections from Planquette’s *New Opera, Bells of Normandy* [for Piano and Violin], arranged by Geo. Wiegand (New York: Carl Fisher 1879); and Selections from *Chimes of Normandy* [for Violin and Piano], arrangement uncredited (Boston: W. F. Shaw, 1879).


41. The team consisted of Jerry Fabris, Peter Dilg, and Adrian Cosentini with funding from the Library of Congress.


43. This was by no means an easy task. The images were recorded at approximately 40–42 frames per second and the recording was made at approximately 125 rpms. Thanks again to Jerry Fabris for this information.

44. The Murch reconstruction of the *Dickson Experimental Sound Film* can be found online at https://archive.org/details/dicksonfilmtwo. It can also be viewed in many DVD collections including *More Treasures from the American Film Archives 1894–1931* (National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004) and *Edison: The Invention of the Movies* (Kino, 2005).

45. I was able to hear this recording on-site at the Edison National Historic Park. Thanks again to Jerry Fabris for facilitating my access to this material.

46. *The Celluloid Closet*, directed by Rob Friedman and Jeffrey Friedman (Sony Pictures Classics, 1996).


48. Scott Simmon, film notes, *More Treasures from American Film Archives* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004), 1, DVD.


50. Musser, 33. This male homosocial world would be both promoted and upended by moving pictures. The content of Edison’s earliest films was driven by masculine culture: blacksmithing and barbershop scenes; Eugen Sandow, the self-proclaimed strongest man in the world; boxing matches; cock fighting; and the erotic spectacles of female dancers Carmencita and Annabelle, or the female contortionist Ena Bertoldi. But, as Kathy Peiss points out, moving pictures “marked a decisive break in [this] pattern.” Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century
New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 146. Miriam Hansen points out that moving pictures gave women "access to a spectacle from which they had previously been excluded . . . the forbidden sight of male bodies in seminudity." This emergence of female spectatorship transformed the public sphere itself, reordering the "gendered itineraries of everyday life and leisure." Miriam Hansen, Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1, 2. And Musser on this point states: "Kinetoscope films and their exhibition were involved in a breakdown and curtailment of an older homosocial world and the emergence and expansion of a newer heterosocial culture." In 1894–95, however, that transformation had not yet emerged, and the Edison laboratory was still a homosocial world. Musser, Edison Motion Pictures, 36.

52. Here are some of those titles: "Song of the Cabin Boy" (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1878, and Boston: W. F. Shaw, 1879); "Cabin Boy's Song" (Boston: White, Smith, 1878); "Song of the Boatman" (St. Louis: Balmer & Weber, 1879); and "On Billows Rocking" (New York: Wynkoop and Hallenbach, 1877 and Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1878). Published libretti offer even more variations. I use "Song of the Cabin Boy," the most commonly used title and the one recent film scholars seem to have settled on.

53. Like "Song of the Cabin Boy," "I'm a Rover of the Sea" was published in a variety of translations: "In All My Travels" (Boston: White, Smith, 1878); "To Me No Stranger" (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1878 and St. Louis: Balmer & Weber, 1879); and "I'm a Rover of the Sea" (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1878). Published libretti offer other variations. It was also widely published in instrumental versions as the "The Chimes of Normandy Waltz." I will use "I'm a Rover of the Sea," the title used in the W. F. Shaw arrangement for violin and piano, which I believe is the one Dickson used, as well as the Hess English Opera version, and in various sheet music and published libretti.

54. In his entry on the film in Edison Motion Pictures and his program notes to the DVD collection, Edison: The Invention of the Movies, Musser mentions that the R (for Raff and Gammon) in the lower right corner may indicate that there had been thoughts of commercial distribution. If so, such plans were never realized. Patrick Loughney is more skeptical. In "Domitor Witnesses the First Complete Public Presentation," he writes that "too small a portion of it can be seen to definitively declare it to be an 'R'" and interviewed on the DVD collection Edison: The Invention of the Movies, he says it was "made purely for experimental purposes." I am in agreement with Loughney here.

55. Dickson is often credited as director of these kinetoscopes, but I am following Charles Musser's lead here and using the term producer.

56. Musser dates it as "by January 1895" in Edison Motion Pictures, 174.
60. Millard, America on Record, 4.
61. Millard, 50.
Several factors contributed to the demise of this system: a major fire at Edison, the loss of European markets in World War I, and the declining revenue for kinetophones in the US.

This is reported by Rosalind Rogoff who quotes a 1912 list of “Twenty Proposed Scenarios” from the Edison Archives, “all of which appear to have been produced.” See Rogoff, “Edison’s Dream,” 64–65. The Lucia di Lammermoor kinetophone is reported by the Harviths. See Harvith and Harvith, Edison, Musicians, 15.

Thomas Edison, quoted in W. K. L and Antonia Dickson, History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope, 3.

Despite what I take to be Dixon’s clear reference here to the Dickson Experimental Sound Film (he introduces Dickson’s film, in fact, in the very next sentence), Dixon rejects a reading of the film as “a projection of homosexuality (in every sense of the word),” interpreting it as a reflection of the male homosocial world at Edison. “It was a time when two men could dance together without arousing comment” (53).

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