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**Entertainers went to jail 110 years ago
for selling these obscene recordings
recently found in Thomas Edison's vault**

What technology made possible, the protectors of public morals made illegal. Just like today.

Champaign, IL: May 16, 2007 — Today Grammy-award winning Archeophone Records releases its newest CD and book, *Actionable Offenses: Indecent Phonograph Recordings from the 1890s*. The compilation features an extraordinary collection of 19th century recordings recently recovered from the vault of the Edison National Historic Site. Presented in their unexpurgated entirety, these explicit performances clearly show how early phonograph superstars satisfied the public's appetite for offensive humor—at least until they were jailed for the offense.

“These pioneers are the forefathers of Don Imus and Howard Stern” says co-producer David Giovannoni. “Put aside the myth of a more genteel era: these Victorian performances are indecent even by today's standards. A newspaper account from 1894 reported they contained ‘the foulest language that is possible for the human mind in its most perverted condition to conceive...accompanied by the most lascivious action between degraded members of both sexes.’ A reviewer could say the same about them today. It would take a lot of bleeps to broadcast them without consequence.”

“These records spoke to working class men in the coarse language of daily experience” continued Giovannoni. “They were stories told readily in the bar; yet they became contraband when fixed in wax and played on a phonograph in that same bar. Anthony Comstock's defenders of decency saw to that. The records on this CD are the few that Comstock's men missed.”

“Nineteenth century reactions to these records presaged the clashes between moralists and media that erupted throughout the 20th century and still erupt today” says Richard Martin, co-producer and co-owner of Archeophone Records. “These are the first records ever censored, and this CD contains the only copies that survive. When David brought these exquisitely rare performances to our attention, we immediately committed to presenting them uncut, uncensored, and in their proper historical context. We worked closely with the Edison National Historic Site to get the best digital transfers. And we engaged Patrick Feaster, the leading scholar in this field, to bring their amazing 19th century American tale to a 21st century audience.”

“It’s really more of a book with a CD than the other way around” adds Meagan Hennessey, co-producer and Archeophone co-owner. “Archeophone’s reputation is built on extensive notes and attractive presentations. But because this controversial material requires extra care and explanation, we’ve employed a new form of packaging that holds a larger CD book in which we can provide extensive context and annotation.”

In February of this year, Giovannoni, Hennessey, and Martin (with author Tim Brooks) received the prestigious Grammy for Best Historical Album – *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1891–1922*. In *Actionable Offenses*, as in that release, the team has prepared a highly accessible yet thoroughly annotated critical edition that introduces important historical recordings to a broad audience and helps scholars incorporate them into their studies.

Learn more about *Actionable Offenses* at www.archeophone.com (ARCH 1007, retail price \$16.99).

About Archeophone Records

Based in Champaign, Illinois, Archeophone was founded in 1998 with the aim of preserving recordings from the acoustic era—the years between 1890 and 1925 when artists made records without electricity, their performances captured by a recording horn. *Actionable Offenses* is Archeophone’s 39th CD release; other notable releases include the critical editions of *The Great War: An American Musical Fantasy* and *Monarchs of Minstrelsy: Historic Recordings by the Stars of the Minstrel Stage*.

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