

# He's jazzing it up with 22,000 favorites



BRIAN PICKELL/TORONTO STAR

**Collector:** Gene Miller, of Etobicoke, stands next to his old Heintzman record player in his basement, which he converted to a record library. Miller and fellow collectors are host to a show Friday and Saturday.

By Angela Bianchi

Gene Miller slowly winds life back into an old 1920s Victrola.

Spinning on top is the Benny Goodman 78, *Breaking In A Pair Of Shoes*. This was the first 78 rpm record Miller bought, back in 1945. Since then he's collected more than 22,000 of them.

The basement of his Etobicoke home has been converted into a record library with discs stored in a unit made from orange crates. On the walls hang photos of Louis Armstrong, Lu Watters, Lionel Hampton and his favorite cornet player, Wingy Mamone. Every piece of space is covered by jazz memorabilia.

Miller became a devout record collector 30 years ago, and now has one of the top five collections in Canada.

## Piano rolls

His collection includes piano rolls from the 1920s, 300 cylinder records, a handful of vintage films and about 4,000 pieces of sheet music, original blues, ragtime and songs of the early 1900s.

Miller has concentrated on collecting early white and obscure white jazz band material, such as the Original Memphis Five, California Ramblers, Louis Prima and Red Nichols.

He won't put a price on his collection. "My collection is worth a fortune because I found it — but I didn't pay a fortune to find it," he says.

He spends from \$2,000 to \$3,000 a year on records alone. "I buy things at nostal-

gia shows, junk shops. People even track me down to sell me records."

His most prized pieces are his Canadiana collection — because, he says, "they're important and scarce records" — and some original blues sheet music by Scott Joplin.

Miller's love for ragtime, blues and vintage jazz is shared by his wife, Brenda. He admits: "She's very supportive of my hobby because she knows it makes me happy."

## Jazz news

Miller also jazzes it up with fellow members of his club, the West Mississauga Jazz Muddies.

They've been together since 1971 and have made a tradition of meeting the third Friday of each month. "We discuss jazz news, upcoming jazz events and play a selection of records."

On Friday and Saturday, the Muddies will hold the 14th annual Canadian Collectors' Congress at the Alder Place Hotel, Dundas St. W. at Kipling.

Collectors from Montreal, Toronto and Detroit will attend auctions, sales, and seminars and dance to the live music of the Rainbow Garden's Jazz Orchestra.

Except when he's with the Muddies, Miller doesn't spend that much time with his collection. He says "I've had fun putting it together . . . the challenge was the hunt and I hope my collection will someday go to someone who'll make use of it."