

playback

PLAYBACK is the bulletin of the British Library National Sound Archive (NSA). It is published free of charge three times a year, with information on the NSA's current and future activities, and news from the world of sound archives and audio preservation. Comments are welcome and should be addressed to the editor at the NSA.

We have a special mailing list for PLAYBACK. Please write, phone, fax or e-mail us, or complete and send in the tear-off slip at the end of this issue (if you have not done so already) if you wish to receive future issues through the post.

The National Sound Archive is one of the largest sound archives in the world and is based at the British Library's new building at St. Pancras.

For further information contact

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Front cover photograph: Paul Simonon of the Clash (photo Pennie Smith)

THE BRITISH LIBRARY
NATIONAL SOUND ARCHIVE

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

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20

what's happening



■ To celebrate the opening of the new building at St. Pancras the British Library held a special concert by invitation only in June which took place in the main foyer (the photo above shows the afternoon rehearsal). The programme included a new work called *Calling across Time*, commissioned for the occasion from the composer Jonathan Harvey. The performers were Sinfonia 21 and their conductor Martyn Brabbins, and the NSA made a recording of the event for inclusion in the archives.

■ The International Music Collection is collaborating in a six-month research project entitled 'Archiving

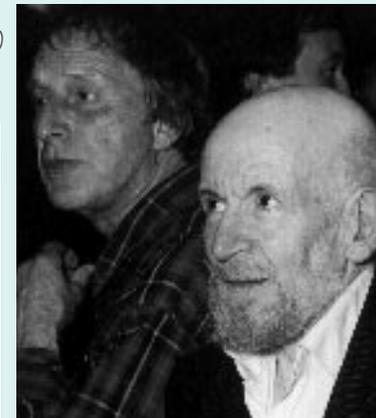
the Music World'. A database of ethnographic and popular music collections worldwide is being compiled, highlighting their existence, condition, status, accessibility, and plans for their preservation. The project will focus particularly on countries where resources and expertise are scarce, and existing collections are in danger of being lost. It is a joint venture with Music for Change, a new organisation working with partner organisations in the UK and overseas to support community music projects throughout the world. Financial support is coming from the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust and the International Association of Sound and Audio-visual Archives. It is hoped

the project will stimulate further research and will help to encourage the international exchange of information between institutions.

■ The Wildlife Section has been enjoying a very productive period. The curator Richard Ranft has recruited Sabrina Djavidnia as a temporary cataloguer using funds granted by the Ellermann Foundation. Two volunteers, Hazel Russman and Edward Bacon, have been helping reduce the backlog of cataloguing. In July the NSA Wildlife Sound Trust launched its fund-raising campaign with a reception at the House of Commons, hosted by Kate Hoey MP. Speeches were made by the Trust's patron, wildlife broadcaster Tony Soper, and by Terry White, the Trust's chairman. The aim of the campaign is to provide additional support for the Section over a three-year period.

The 'Artists Lives' reception

Basil Beattie (left) and Gustav Metzger (right)
Nicholas Serota, Director and Ronald King
of the Tate Gallery



■ Now in the shops is a new CD-ROM release entitled *One Hundred Treasures from the British Library*. As well as famous treasures from the British Library's printed and manuscript collections, such as the Magna Carta and the Diamond Sutra, the CD-ROM features ten sound treasures from the NSA. These were chosen to represent our seven curatorial sections and range from James Joyce reading 'Aeolius' from *Ulysses* to Stravinsky rehearsing his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* in 1948 and a rare recording of the extinct Hawaiian Kauai O'o A'a. Priced at £14.95, this CD-ROM (ISBN 0-7123-4318-0) is available from the British Library bookshop at St Pancras (Tel: 0171-412 7735; E-mail: blbookshop@bl.uk), or from Turpin Distribution Services, Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Herts SG6 1HN (Tel: 01462 672555;



E-mail: turpin@rsc.org). Sound treasures from the NSA can also be heard in the British Library's exhibition galleries, open to the public seven days a week at St. Pancras.

■ In June the Oral History section and the National Life Story Collection held an evening reception in the British Library conference centre to celebrate the 'Artists Lives' project. Key speakers included the BL Chairman Dr John Ashworth, Marjorie Althorp-Guyton from the Arts Council, and Nicholas Serota, Director of the Tate Gallery. Nearly 200 people enjoyed an audio-visual presentation of extracts from the collection introduced by Mel Gooding and were presented with a special CD and leaflet on departure.

■ The NSA will shortly be on the air again, though not on any radio near you. After reading *Playback* 19, Adriana Alexander of The London Radio Service contacted us about devising short programmes for listeners in Latin America and Russia. (The LRS is funded by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and makes programmes about life in the UK available to countries all over the world.) Three general programmes have been made: the two destined for Latin America highlight the NSA's collection of talks by Latin American authors and our wildlife CD *Rainforest Requiem*. Russian listeners can expect to find out more about the history of British pop music. The programmes were presented by BL linguists Chris Clark (NSA – Spanish) Ann Wade (RS&CD Hispanic Section – Portuguese) and Chris Thomas (RS&CD Slavonic Section – Russian) and were beamed by satellite to radio stations in the countries concerned in October.

■ With the opening of the group listening service the full complement of the National Sound Archive's public services at St. Pancras is now operational. To make an appointment contact the Listening & Viewing Service (Tel: 0171-412 7418; Fax: 0171-412 7441).

the century speaks

the Millennium Oral History Project

by Rob Perks

■ There have so far been few attempts in Britain to emulate the pioneering New Deal WPA Federal Writers' Project which collected thousands of life stories from people across the United States during the Depression of the inter-war years. Our own National Life Story Awards in 1993/4 demonstrated the value of gathering personal testimony from so-called 'ordinary' people but generated only a fairly modest archive of several hundred interviews (though they did fill some gaps in the NSA's oral history collections). With the impending new Millennium – a special moment in our history – we felt that the time was right to launch a major project that would collect a unique snapshot, through people's memories and reflections, of what makes Britain 'tick' and how it has changed within living memory.

In the spring of 1997 a proposal was discussed with the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), which is responsible for



Bradford Heritage Recording Unit

the Dome and the Millennium Challenge, and they enthusiastically took up the idea. It soon became clear that the BBC was thinking along similar lines and we agreed to pool resources. One year later we are now working together on an ambitious joint project (in collaboration with the Oral History Society, the National Life Story Collection and the Arts Council of England), backed by an investment of



Grace Robertson

£1.3m from BBC Regional Broadcasting.

Forty oral history producers have been recruited, one for every BBC local radio station in the UK, and this team will be creating 40 parallel radio series of 16 themed half-hour programmes (640 in all), gathering in the process around 8,000 oral history interviews on MiniDisc.

People will be asked to talk about their homes and families, their

changing experience of work, health, crime, money, technology and leisure, of growing up, getting older, and of their hopes and fears for the future. These interviews will form an important new oral history archive – The Millennium Memory Bank – at the NSA.

NSA staff are playing an important role, not only in archiving the material but in training BBC staff in the conduct of oral history interviews and showing them how to document the recordings. Each interview will be barcoded and documented by BBC staff using a template compatible with the NSA's CADENSA catalogue and the original MiniDiscs will arrive at the NSA once the programmes have been edited and are ready for transmission in September 1999.

Discussions are continuing between the BL and NMEC on expanding the project. Our original vision was to create an online digital archive accessible anywhere in the UK, but that depends on receiving additional funding. But whatever happens the Millennium Memory Bank will provide a remarkable new resource for all kinds of BL users in the future: the largest oral history project ever mounted in Britain.

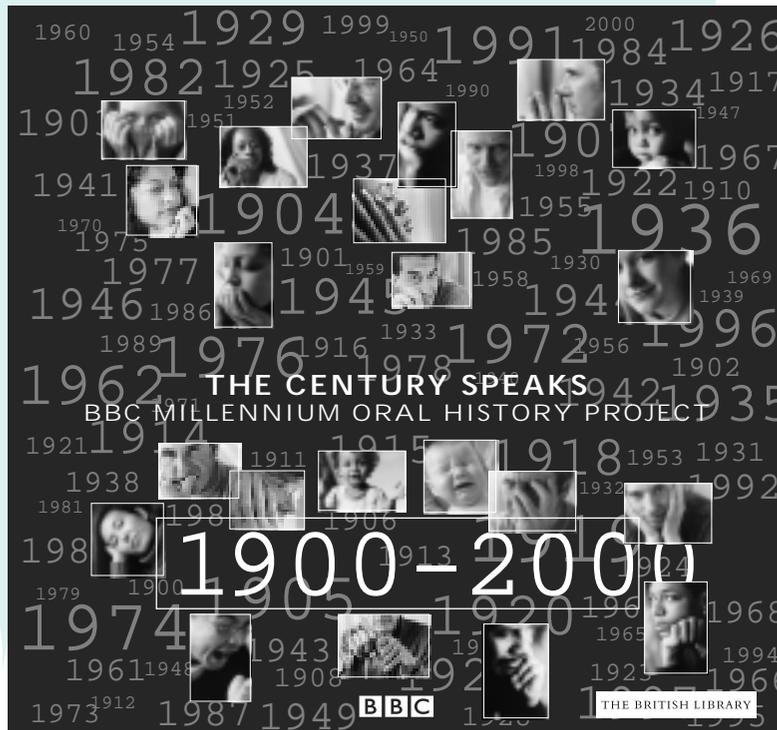
top photo: Lord Soper is interviewed by his grand-daughter, Catherine Jenkins

■ The Millennium Oral History Project will form a snapshot of what the British think of themselves and their past from the single perspective of the century's end. Memories will be gathered under 16 headings and we will hear teenagers and centenarians talking about the same themes so that each subject is seen through the eyes of different generations.

The sequence of themes begins with **Where We Live** and **House and Home** – memories of the changing landscape of town and country as the rising population demanded space for living and leisure. And what home means – ownership, gardening, DIY, neighbours, as well as housing shortage and homelessness.

Living Together will reflect some of the key changes in family life – contraception, single parenthood and stepfamilies, black-white and gay relationships, living alone – as well as the many aspects of relationships that have changed very little through the century.

Who Are We and **Belonging** will draw on experiences of migration, emigration and immigration during the course of the century and how



gathering memories

the themes of the memory bank

by Rob Perks

these movements in and out of Britain have affected people's lives and the communities they've moved to. Where do we belong and does the idea of community still mean something?

In **Crime and the Law** we ask how attitudes to and experience of crime have changed. Contributors will be invited to talk about the police, about life in prison, and the changing impact of the law on their lives.

Growing Up and **Getting Older** bring together memories of childhood and old age. Childhood as we know it today is surprisingly new and almost unrecognisable compared to that of our grandparents and great grandparents. The pattern of old age has changed dramatically too – in 1900, one person in twenty was over 60, now it's one in five.

In the early years of the century, life at work meant a simple relationship with simple technology. On the theme of **Technology** people will talk about mass production, the assembly line and the silicon chip and the impact of these on their working lives.

Eating and Drinking will chart changing attitudes to food and drink, nutrition and diet and how the

average family's idea of gastronomic heaven moved beyond toad-in-the-hole to ethnic restaurants, nouvelle cuisine and convenience foods.

In **Money**, we ask people to talk about the effect of rising affluence for the average Briton. Spending, saving, investing, borrowing – and the world of the 'never-never', the mortgage, the supermarket, 'keeping up with the Jones's', benefits, the dole – and gambling.

The most popular leisure activity outside the home today is going to the pub – just as it was 100 years ago, but in two related themes, **Playtime** and **Going Places**, we explore the great expansion of opportunities for leisure and travel, the development of mass tourism and its impact on 'Britishness', and the arrival of the car as both blessing and scourge in modern life.

In the early 1900s life was fragile. Doctors were effectively powerless observers of illness. Today the NHS is Europe's biggest organisation employing a million people. Changing attitudes to health, illness, fitness and alternative medicine down the century will be gathered for the theme **Life and Death**.

Beliefs and Fears will ask people about their religious experience in a century when church-going has been in serious decline but for many Britons, the need for a spiritual dimension to life seems undiminished. How have attitudes to faith, alternative religions, church, astrology, and superstition changed our lives?

In our final theme, **What's Next**, 8000 interviewees have the chance to express their hopes and fears for the future as the new millennium begins. What kind of legacy are we leaving our children and grandchildren? What's worth taking from the 20th century to our own personal desert island?

If you wish to be considered as a potential interviewee or wish to suggest others who might take part, please get in touch with the project team in your area. You should contact: The Oral History Producer at your nearest BBC local radio station, or in the case of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the appropriate BBC national station.

Contact details for all BBC stations can be found on the BBC Online website at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcuk/>

ATRAC-tions

the MiniDisc format

by Alan Ward

■ The MiniDisc format will be used to record the interviews for the Millennium Oral History Project. The technology was introduced by Sony in 1992, and following technical improvements and price reductions it is catching on, especially in Japan where its sales are said to have



overtaken conventional CD. MiniDiscs are 64mm in diameter and come in a 68x72mm plastic case. The pre-recorded version is single-sided and is manufactured using similar digital technology to conventional published CDs. The recordable version is double-sided and relies on digital magneto-optical technology. As on the CD-R format, 74 minutes of stereo

recording are possible, and in order to cram so much music or speech on to such a small disc, a compression system called ATRAC is used to achieve a 5:1 reduction. ATRAC partly relies on the fact that only a proportion of the sound spectrum is audible to the human ear, and much of the spectrum is unused in the production and recording of many sounds: if only those elements which are perceptible are recorded, considerable space can be saved on the disc. ATRAC carries out the analysis needed to achieve this.

Recent MiniDisc recordings are usually indistinguishable from uncompressed digital recordings (e.g. on R-DAT) for normal listening and sound better than analogue recordings on compact cassette. Other advantages of the format are that recordings can be edited, reordered and a table of contents produced; portable recorders are no larger than an average Walkman cassette player; the more highly specified ones are still

cheaper than professional compact cassette recorders and much cheaper than R-DAT; and many MiniDisc recorders and players feature a digital memory buffer which gives much better shockproofing than CD players. It is not surprising that MiniDisc has become very popular in the UK as a field recording and editing medium in broadcasting.

Peter Copeland, head of the NSA Technical Section, field tested a top-of-the-range Sony 'amateur' machine on a recent trip to Canada and found it robust and largely impervious to climatic change. But he had difficulties in the use of both rechargeable and alkaline batteries, and found the minijack connections fragile. An adaptation to standard jacks is fitted to the MiniDisc kits which were issued to the Millennium Oral History Project recordists.

At present the NSA is watching and waiting for MiniDisc developments before adding a wide range of recordings on the format to its collections. We have concerns about the longevity of the recordable discs in storage, and about the use of compression in recording, because it limits the options for future generations, and about the ease (or otherwise) of transferring MiniDisc recordings to other storage media.



hip-hop in the classroom

pop music in education

by Andy Linehan

■ Last September I attended the annual conference of The International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) UK branch, hosted by The Institute of Popular Music at Liverpool University. Papers were given by delegates from as far afield as Finland, Israel and Australia and covered topics such as The Beatles' stylistic development in relation to the *White Album*, Australian country music, and popular music policy and the local state. Earlier in the same month I agreed to present seminars to groups of sixth form media

studies students on popular music and the development of rap. At the same time, as visiting lecturer at The Royal Academy of Music, I was preparing to meet a new intake of students on the Commercial Music B Mus course for the first of their 12 seminars on the history of popular music.

The coincidence of these events did not seem unnatural, but it did underline that, even though it is relatively young as a subject, Popular Music has firmly established itself in the curricula of schools and higher education over the last 20 or so years.

The teaching of music in school classrooms has always relied to some extent on the preferences of the individual teacher, and traditional teaching used to favour classical in preference to popular forms (which were often the preferred style of the pupils). More recently, teaching music theory and practice using contemporary examples alongside the traditional classical pieces has become a useful (and valid) way of stimulating young musicians' interest while instilling the requisite skills up to A-Level standard, so it is not only media studies students who are likely

to be requesting sixth form seminars on aspects of popular music. In addition, the development of the so-called 'Fame' schools such as the BPI-backed BRIT school and Sir Paul McCartney's Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts encourage talented pupils to develop their ideas in a specialized environment leading to diplomas in areas such as production and performance technology.

Successful students now have a wide choice of opportunities in higher education, with over 20 institutions currently offering courses to degree level in popular music. Many other degree courses now include popular music studies as a major element.

The University of Westminster, for example, founded a BA (Hons) in Commercial Music as a three-year full time course in 1993. The course provides for both the aspiring

performer/producer/arranger, and for those who wish to concentrate on a career in the commercial side of the industry, by offering modules concentrating on either Music Production or Music Business, and successful graduates are now operating in both fields. The Royal Academy of Music, in a departure from its usual sphere of interest, started a B Mus course in Commercial Music at the same time, concentrating on the practice of writing, recording and arranging popular music in areas such as film, television and theatre as well as for commercial release.

The NSA also receives popular music enquiries from sociology, psychology, business studies and other non-music departments in many universities, where students may be taking an aspect of the pop phenomenon and analysing it in

their own particular terms – a linguistics student writing a thesis on the development of language in rap and hip-hop, for example. However, the fact that popular music studies can be spread around different departments at different institutions across the country is potentially a problem, for, as with any relatively new field of study, researchers need to be aware of the work of others and discuss ideas, methodology and results.

This was recognised in 1981 when a group of pop researchers founded IASPM to promote inquiry, scholarship and analysis in popular music and an understanding of the processes involved in its production and consumption. IASPM aims to be interprofessional and interdisciplinary, and the majority of its 600 members worldwide are university teachers and postgraduates. In the past most members have been musicologists and sociologists, but as its membership increases work in other areas such as geography comes into the frame.

Of course IASPM members do not represent the entire body of popular music researchers in the academic world, but keeping in touch with their work gives the NSA Pop section a good indication of the types of resources that we should

be making available and how they might be used. Contemporary musicology has now reached the stage where day-schools are held to discuss Britpop, and researchers are asking to hear various interpretations of 'Anarchy in the UK', so it is important that we maintain contemporary acquisitions and make them accessible. The NSA's open access collection of the Popular Music press is always in high demand, and more and more researchers are using off-air recordings of documentaries and interviews as source material. There is an increasing number of academic journals and books covering the Popular Music field, often the result of the authors' research using NSA material.

We are also aware of problems faced by researchers. Many are frustrated by their own departments' inability to hold extensive archives of sound recordings (usually for financial reasons) and the need to travel to St Pancras to listen to NSA collection material. But equally they appreciate the vital role of the NSA in collecting and preserving the full range of recorded popular music. As popular music studies advance into new disciplines and the number of courses on offer increases, the Pop section will continue to reflect these changes in its services.

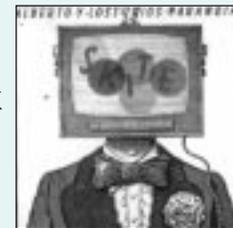
■ a selection of NSA-held recordings for comparative study



■ Sex Pistols – Anarchy in the UK
From CD *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle* Virgin CDVDX2510
NSA Ref 1CD0065355

■ Sex Pistols – Anarchy in the UK (Demo)
From CD *Pretty Vacant* Receiver Records RRDCD 004
NSA Ref 1CD0042486

■ Alberto Y Lost Trios Paranoias – Anarchy in the UK
From CD *Skite* Line Records TACD 9.007790
NSA Ref 1CD0093961



■ Frazier Chorus – Anarchy in the UK
From CD Single *Sloppy Heart* Virgin VSCD1192
NSA Ref 1SS0000134



■ Green Jelly – Anarchy in the UK
From 12" single *Anarchy in the UK* Zoo Records 74321159051
NSA Ref 1TH0019290

■ Megadeth – Anarchy in the UK
From CD *So far, so good...so what!* Capitol CDP7481482
NSA Ref 1CD0010323



■ Wild Billy Childish and The Blackhands – Anarchy in the UK
From LP *Play Capt. Calypso's Hoodoo Party* Hangman HANG-21UP
NSA Ref 1LP0004935

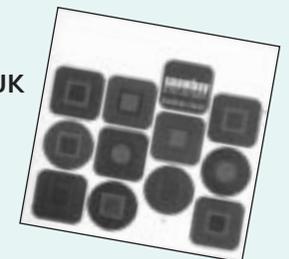


■ Frank Sidebottom – Anarchy in Timperley
From CD *Frank Sidebottom's A B C & D...The best of* Cherry Red CDMRED143
NSA Ref New Acquisition

■ Xenophobia – Anarchy in the UK
From CD *The Pretty and the Vacant* Released Emotions REM019CD
NSA Ref 1CD0057519



■ Snowboy & The Latin Section – Anarchy in the UK
From CD *Something's Coming* Acid Jazz JAZIDCD92
NSA Ref 1CD0068476



nsa user profile

andrew roberts



Andrew Roberts took a First in Modern History at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge. His two history books, 'The Holy Fox: A Biography of Lord Halifax' (1991) and 'Eminent Churchillians' (1994) were published to critical acclaim. He has also written a novel, 'The Aachen Memorandum' (1995). He writes a political column in 'The Sunday Times', and reviews history books for several newspapers and journals. He is currently writing the authorised biography of the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, the Victorian Prime Minister. He lives in Chelsea with his wife Camilla, a barrister, and their one-year old son Henry.

When did you first use the National Sound Archive?

It was in 1988 when I was researching my first book, 'The Holy Fox: a Biography of Lord Halifax'. I was interested to hear the voices not only of Halifax himself, but also of other leading figures of his time, such as Churchill and Chamberlain, Curzon and Balfour. I brought Halifax's son, Lord Holderness, and his wife, and also Curzon's daughter, who knew Halifax very well. We heard the recordings in the grand old front room at Exhibition Road in Kensington [the NSA's former premises]. I remember you played them on huge old discs.

What is the value of sound recordings for historians?

I find hearing people from the past very evocative. In a few short moments it fixes the period in context. Sound by itself is almost better than video, because it allows your imagination to take off. There

you are in the same room as Chamberlain, or whoever. Also, it can be surprising what the speaking voice can tell you. For example, I had expected Curzon to sound much more upper-class, but in fact he said 'brass' with a short 'a' rather than a long, aristocratic 'a'. At the moment I am writing a biography of Lord Salisbury but unfortunately he didn't leave any recordings, even though he lived into the period of sound recording.

Will sound recordings play a more important role for the historian in future?

It is possible to put that argument forward. People don't collect e-mails, at least not yet, and faxes don't generally survive, though I believe diaries will continue to be very important. It is a shame telephone calls aren't routinely kept as they were in the early days, when the Foreign Office would write them down as precisely as

any other form of communication. As Nixon said, the one thing he learned from the Watergate scandal was to burn the tapes. Audio is certainly becoming more important and that seems to me a good reason why the NSA should be well funded for the future.

How do you use the National Sound Archive?

Generally I just phone up with the names of the people I want to hear and they get the recordings ready for me. They are very helpful too, always mentioning when they have discovered recordings by related people that I might find useful. Overall I was a sceptic about the new British Library, but I have been completely won over working there. Also, I will only have to make one visit now – for books and sound recordings – though I did love that eccentric old building in Kensington. Once you have moved out, it'll make somebody a wonderful house.

events

London International Jewish Music Festival

The ninth festival, called "The World of Jewish Music", will be held at various venues in London.

Contact: Jewish Music Heritage Trust, P.O. Box 232, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 2NN. Tel: 0181-909 2445. Fax: 0181-909 1030. E-mail: jewishmusic@jmht.org
November 1-29

British Forum for Ethnomusicology

A one-day conference on 'Music and Meaning' hosted by the Open University
Contact: Kevin Dawe, B.F.E. Conference, c/o Music Dept. The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. E-mail: k.n.dawe@open.ac.uk
November 14

The 1998 Annual Conference of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA), will be held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Contact: Comité d'organisation IASA Paris 1998, c/o AFAS, BnF, 11, quai François Mauriac 75706 Paris Cedex 13, France
Tel: 33 1 53 59 53 10
Fax: 33 1 53 79 47 82 / 33 1 53 79 47 21
E-mail: iasa@ircam.fr
November 15-20

MIDEM 24-28

Annual record industry conference at Palais Des Festivals, Cannes, France
Contact: Emma Dallas
Tel: 0171-528 0086. Fax: 0171-895 0949
Website: <http://www.midem.com>
January 24-28

Indian Music in the Age of Reproduction

A two-day workshop at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta.
Contact: Amitabha Ghosh, CSSS, Calcutta, 10 Lake Terrace, Calcutta 700029, India
E-mail: abhijit@csss.ernet.in
January 28-29

If you are not already on the NSA's mailing list and would like to be, please fill in and return this slip to
PLAYBACK, The British Library National Sound Archive, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB
ADDRESS