

ISSUE 29 **playback** >
Spring 2003

playback >

PLAYBACK is the bulletin of the British Library Sound Archive. It is published free of charge twice a year, with information on the Sound Archive'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.

We have a special mailing list for PLAYBACK. Please write, phone, fax or email 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.

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Front cover photograph:
'50 Years of Number Ones'. Elizabeth Hunter

PLAYBACK: Editor Alan Ward, Production manager Richard Fairman, Layout Julie Rimmer



BRITISH LIBRARY

**SOUND
ARCHIVE**

WHAT'S HAPPENING

■ As part of a comprehensive review of the British Library brand, we have decided to change our name. We are now the British Library Sound Archive. This issue of *Playback* includes the new logo and reflects the Library's new visual identity.



Janet Caddock

Signatories of the SCENAA memorandum of understanding

■ In November the Sound Archive hosted a meeting of European audio-visual archives from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the UK. The Standing Council of European National Audiovisual Archives [SCENAA] was adopted as the name of the group, with Crispin Jewitt as the convenor. SCENAA aims to influence policy at a European and national government level, and to facilitate cooperation between institutions.

■ As a conservation measure we have recently begun copying our digital audio recordings held on Betamax videotape. The recordings are not in danger, but the technology is already so obsolete that working machines are hard to find. We have a stockpile of machines but would like to hear from readers who wish to part with Betamax videorecorders in good working condition.

■ The British Institute of Organ Studies mounted a one-day conference at the Library entitled 'Organ Studies and Recordings' in November, which drew heavily on our holdings. The speakers included distinguished organ virtuoso Peter Hurford, Dr Sverker Jullander from the University of Gothenberg and Tim Day, curator of Western Art Music, who gave a paper on styles of organ accompaniment to the psalms in English cathedrals, a topic best studied by analysis of recordings since these accompaniments are not written down.

■ A preview of the *In Place* project, financed by the New Opportunities Fund, now appears on the British Library website and includes an introduction to part of the ethnographic wax cylinder collection which will be part of the Sound Archive's contribution to the project. The first of the wax cylinders that



you will be able to hear online is now available as a sample. It features Ashanti drumming recorded by R.S.Rattray in 1921. www.bl.uk/about/inplaceintro.html



Elizabeth Hunter

■ The British Library's exhibition '50 Years of Number Ones', featuring all the discs to reach number 1 in the charts, has been an outstanding success, with constant demand from listeners and extensive coverage on TV, radio, the web and in the press. Owing to its popularity the exhibition has been extended until March. All the recordings came from the holdings of the Sound Archive, prepared by pop music curator Andy Linehan, who also brought together the display of extracts from publications, disc sleeves etc. A very successful reception was held on the eve of the actual chart anniversary, attended by around 200 prominent record industry figures.

■ In November the oral history curator Rob Perks gave three presentations in Japan on oral history in the UK: at a conference in Tokyo organised by the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies; at Kyoto University; and at Okayama University. He also held meetings with Japanese oral historians and visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum where he met Yasuo Kohnoike, head of their oral history programme.

■ Toby Oakes, curator of drama and literature, has left the Sound Archive after 19 years to return to academic life. Andrew Simons, jazz curator, has moved to the Library's Operations and Services directorate where he will play a major role in the Sound Archive's reading room presence.

LEARNING TO LISTEN

Education at the Sound Archive by Rob Perks

'Lifelong learners', as we now call educational users of all kinds, are at the centre of the British Library's strategy to broaden its user base and popularise its treasures. This issue of *Playback* is devoted to the role that the Sound Archive's educational activities will play in this strategy.

Sound Archive curators have always been in demand as 'speakers-with-a-difference' at conferences and as contributors to specialist publications, but since our move to St Pancras many more students of all ages have been keen to visit. Royal Holloway College geographers, SOAS ethnomusicologists, London University historians and pupils from Burntwood School in south-west London, have all left the building 'amazed' by the Sound Archive's eclectic collections, inspired perhaps to do some of their own recordings, but certainly more aware of the possibilities of sound and ways of listening. Aside from student visits, special events such as the Saul Seminars do a similar job for more specialist audiences: in the case of music encouraging comparative research and a recognition of subjective opinion as part of the 'scholarly musicological picture'.

Both on-site and off, new technology offers ever-expanding opportunities to reach new users, so well demonstrated by the enormous success of the touch-screen audio displays in the '50 Years of Number Ones' exhibition. When else have we seen visitors and readers dancing and singing in the British Library? Listening points have popped up elsewhere in the building and sound is making regular appearances in temporary exhibitions. Five children's book illustrators were interviewed for the recent 'Magic Pencil' exhibition, talking vividly and often amusingly about their artwork in the gallery. And the Sound Archive's popular jukeboxes were the focus for a mini-oral history display celebrating 50 years of Scope (formerly the Spastics Society). The aim here was to use personal testimonies to challenge preconceptions about disability, and this feeds into the Library's education programme related to the new emphasis in the school curriculum on citizenship [www.21citizen.org.uk] to which the Sound Archive has been a contributor.

There has been demand for Sound Archive recordings in a host of settings. Wildlife recordings add a vital new dimension to static museum displays (even re-imagining soundscapes from the Ice Age!) and art galleries are now embracing oral history. A recent Victoria & Albert Museum photography exhibition, 'Stepping In and Out: Contemporary Documentary Photography', showcased revealing interviews with the artists, and a retrospective of post-war British sculpture at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds offered visitors an audio tour voiced by the sculptors themselves, which sparked a debate about the role of artists' own narratives in the study of art history.

The Web, of course, takes wider audio access a step further and we have been exploring ways of expanding the availability of sound through our online catalogue; through a web-based 'gallery of sound'; and also through dedicated learning resources based on the collections. The 'Voices of the Holocaust' website [www.bl.uk/education/projects/index.html] is an example, marshalling moving audio extracts from oral histories, maps, glossaries, teachers' notes, downloadable worksheets, photographs and background materials, for direct yet flexible classroom use. The emphasis is placed firmly on listening (anywhere, anytime) to the testimonies.

In similar vein the British Library's Education team is planning a programme to develop young people's listening skills, and in analysing and understanding the contexts for music and spoken word and performance. A new website 'Sound Thinking' will soon be available as part of an engagement strategy around text, image and sound concentrating on core skills and critical thinking. On-site visits and enrichment seminars on similar themes ensure a face-to-face element to educational work is retained. Also in prospect are more online educational resources such as map-interfaced dialect and wildlife recordings through the 'In Place' digitisation programme [www.bl.uk/about/inplaceintro]. For lifelong learners the Sound Archive will never have been easier to explore!

A CRUCIAL CHALLENGE FOR ARCHIVES IN THE 21ST CENTURY WILL BE THEIR ABILITY TO PROJECT THEIR COLLECTIONS BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THEIR FOUR WALLS. TO REMAIN RELEVANT AND VALUED THEY MUST INSPIRE, EXCITE, ENCOURAGE AND ENGAGE NEW AUDIENCES IN NEW WAYS.

AT THE COALFACE

Studying ethnomusicology by Keith Howard

The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (SOAS), runs the largest MMus programme in ethnomusicology in Europe. It has become customary for us to supplement the more theoretical offerings of our core course, 'Ethnomusicology in Practice', with an annual trip to the British Library Sound Archive. The trip is not designed merely to access the vast and wonderful archive of recordings. It reflects our belief that it is vital to link with specialists in recording and archiving techniques, and the contact with Janet Topp Fargion and her colleagues – those who, rather than us full-time academics, work at the coal face with DAT, cassettes and the horrors of digitisation – is therefore invaluable.

Each ethnomusicologist must learn skills for fieldwork, skills that include gaining permissions, recording in appropriate ways, documenting and archiving materials. This provides the focus for a presentation by the staff of the International Music Section. The horror stories of forgetting batteries, or of DAT recorders failing because of

dust settling on recording heads, or of the perils of relying on minijack inputs on MD recorders all need to be heard.

The story of where we came from – from wax cylinders of speech and music, through the massive truck-mounted generators used by Klaus Wachsmann to enable him to record African music in the 1940s, to the hotly debated pros and cons of the various digital technologies for ethnographic recording – provide the context for the learning process. The lessons are learnt, and each year students return from fieldwork with their own accounts of placing DAT recorders in plastic bags to avoid the sand and keeping a set of batteries in reserve, and so on.

Essentially, the HMV high-street experience of world music is limited, biased towards recent recordings of musicians who are prepared to match their music to what European promoters want. To many, this may be enough, but to those training as ethnomusicologists much more is needed. To trace the history of recorded sound back to its roots is just as important as studying 19th and early-20th

century scholarly accounts. Equally, the reality of copyright and other rights needs to be tied to real recordings and to the requirements that an organisation such as the British Library has for recordings that may be lodged with them. And the archive offers a two-way exchange of materials and ideas.

The chance that the archive extends to contribute voluntary work enables a number of students to access rare recordings and develop their knowledge of what actually exists for a given musical tradition. Again, offers of blank media, and when needed, loans of equipment, enable many fieldwork dreams to become realities. Within all of this, students may not always agree with what they learn of archiving practice, but they recognise the treasure-house that the British Library Sound Archive is; subsequent to the annual trip, a large proportion of students register as British Library readers and listeners.

Keith Howard is Senior Lecturer in Ethnomusicology at SOAS

WHEN FISH SPEAK

Geography and culture

by Mike Dolton

Since 1997 a trip to the British Library Sound Archive has become a part of the Interpretive Research Module of the MA Cultural Geography (Research) programme at Royal Holloway College. As sound becomes an important research resource, and subject area, students are increasingly appreciating the worth of the Sound Archive's collections. For example, recent essays and dissertations from Cultural Geography students have included work on 'soundscapes' and oral histories, which have been inspired by the visit to the Sound Archive. As such, our students have reflected some of the ways in which geographers are making connections between sound, space and place. For

example, in their introduction to *The Place of Music*, Leyshon et al. describe this collection of writings as '*... present[ing] space and place not simply as sites where or about which music happens to be made, or over which music has diffused; rather here different spatialities are suggested as being formative of the sounding and resounding of music, and the mutually generative relations of music and place.*'

Music can thus play a part in the social and cultural production of place whilst also being constituted from such relations in particular places. M. Hamilton's *History Workshop Journal* article 'Sexual Politics and African-American Music; or, Placing Little Richard in History' for example, places the transformation of Richard Penniman into Little Richard within African American, working class rhythm and blues clubs in New Orleans. Penniman drew his inspiration, at least in part, from the 'raucous' acts in such venues, notably the drag queen acts which took

'centre stage' in venues such as the Dew Drop Inn.

Much has also been said about the relationships between particular places and music scenes and forms, the most obvious recent example being the film dramatisation of the Hacienda. If you need to know more the Sound Archive can fill you in. For geographers at Royal Holloway, the Sound Archive is much more than a music archive. Students never fail to be amazed by the eclectic nature of the collections, such as the mating call of the haddock and the moving testimonies of survivors in the Holocaust oral history collection.

The consequent impact on students' imaginations always makes the visit worthwhile and highlights the potential of sounds as text, and as subject areas for further research. The Sound Archive thus serves as both a focus and a stimulus for postgraduate research.

Mike Dolton is a lecturer in the Geography Department, Royal Holloway College, London University.

STUDYING THEATRE

The Forced Entertainment collection by Steve Cleary



The best-known strength of the Drama and Literature collection in education is our long-established series of live theatre recordings. These are consulted as often by English literature or theatre students as by writers, researchers, or actors preparing for a role. But while these recordings are unique they are limited to non-commercial mainstream theatre productions, mainly by the National Theatre, Royal Court, and Royal Shakespeare Company. In fact the Drama and Literature collection encompasses all British drama and non-musical performance, and for more than 20 years we have collected experimental theatre on video, including companies and performers such as Ron Athey, Bobby Baker, Rose English, Annie Griffin, Lumiere & Son, Station House Opera and Théâtre de Complicité. Much of this work can only be studied at the Sound Archive since it is unscripted.

A prime example is the video archive of Forced Entertainment, the influential Sheffield-based experimental theatre group, acquired in 1999. As their website [www.forced.co.uk] shows, Forced Entertainment have their own educational programme, making available a wide range of videos and texts of their past repertoire, a resource pack, and an educational CD-ROM and video aimed specifically at the 16-20 age group. For many users, a video of the public performance of a particular show may prove sufficient, but those who wish to dig deeper are directed to the Sound Archive.

Holding over 300 rehearsal videotapes, accumulated over a period of 18 years, the Sound Archive can provide a unique document of the process by which members of the company collectively devise their performance pieces. Users may view videotapes made at various stages of a piece's development, both in rehearsal and in front of an audience, and study the accompanying documentation such as slides and promotional flyers. The videos were originally produced as aids to the creative process, rather than primarily as documentary records. The collection has been extensively consulted by students, academics and theatre professionals and is still growing – a recent addition was *Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me?* – a 24-hour performance spread across eight tapes. (This, incidentally, ousted Ken Campbell's 18-hour staging of *The Warp* as the longest continuous production in the collection.)

We also make every effort to complement original performance material with location recordings of relevant academic seminars. Some recent examples include the symposium on the theme of childhood, *Why Do We Play?*, organized in November by the London International Festival of Theatre, to which Forced Entertainment founding member Tim Etchells contributed, and the two-day Wooster Group symposium last May, which featured many rare insights into the working methods of this celebrated and radical New York ensemble.

A GROWTH AREA

New musicologies by Timothy Day



I see the exploitation of [a] hundred years of recorded repertory as one of the growth areas for musicology; our sound archives are full of primary texts that still lie at the margin rather than the centre of musicology... Putting them at the centre of musicology also means putting performers there, alongside composers; maybe the idea of a 'history of music' that proves on inspection to be nothing but a 'history of composition' will one day seem ludicrously out of kilter with the role of music in our society, and the ways in which we enjoy and value it... And we have to develop musicologies of sound rather than of written texts.

Professor Nicholas Cook, University of Southampton:
'What is musicology?' www.soton.ac.uk/~ncook/what.html

We realize that different listeners respond to and interpret and evaluate the same musical work in many different ways as a result of education, class, gender, age, temperament, musical experience and so on. Formerly most musicologists considered it their duty to issue objective value judgements, both about compositions and performing styles. Those who peddled subjective opinions were seen as dilettantes or journalists, enemies of true musical scholarship with its rational scientific basis to evaluation. But more recent debate about the different

expressive values of music has led many to the perception that meanings are not found in music divested of the contexts in which it is listened to, but are constantly argued about, negotiated, and nuanced by those who use music in particular ways in particular social situations.

Viewed from this perspective, even the greatest of European musical masterpieces, such as Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, Mozart's 'Jupiter' Symphony, or Beethoven's late string quartets are, as an ethnomusicologist has put it, 'the result of what a lot of people have done jointly'. Which is why recordings are at last coming into the scholarly musicological picture. The British Library Sound Archive has contributed directly to this developing field in two ways.

Since 1999 we have run a series of seminars, named after Patrick Saul and designed particularly for scholars and performing musicians, including postgraduates and undergraduates at universities and music colleges, but open to everyone. The seminars aim to demonstrate some of the work being undertaken on recordings by music historians, musicologists, and performing musicians: on the history of recording and its effects on performances, on evolving performance practices documented on recordings, on the effect of recording on the musical repertory performed live and on tape and disc, on the ways music is listened to and the ways in which performers and composers have used recordings, on the formation of taste, and the changing ways audiences have used music, on the changing meanings of music, on music as high culture and the history in the 20th century of its relationship to mass culture.

Speakers have included musicologists like Professors Stephen Banfield and Nicholas Cook, performers like Sir Charles Mackerras and Mitsuko Uchida, the composer Jonathan Harvey, scholar/performers like Professor Laurence Dreyfus of King's College, London and Charles Rosen from New York, the sociologist Tia de Nora, the anthropologist Georgina Born, the record producers Michael Haas and Christopher Bishop, and the administrator Sir John Drummond.

In addition, to facilitate the hands-on use of recordings in research we were able to establish the Edison Visiting Fellowship Scheme in 2000, whereby

scholars are given privileged access to the collections for a fixed period, usually about three months, during which special assistance and facilities are provided. There have been applications for these fellowships from staff and students at numerous British and overseas universities and conservatories, and among subjects already investigated have been the impact of recordings on musical culture and taste in England and France up to the 1950s, the performance history of Bach's B Minor Mass and of Bartók's string quartets, the classical saxophone on early recordings, and the interpretation of 19th-century Lieder by singers born before 1875.

Further information about the Saul Seminars, and about applications for the Edison Fellowships, is available from the Western Art Music section.

SAUL SEMINARS

18 MARCH RECORDINGS AND THE 'AUTHORITY' OF THE COMPOSER
Robert Philip (The Open University)



8 APRIL ORCHESTRAL INTERPRETATION: WHEN IS THE PAST RELEVANT?
Sir Roger Norrington (London)

6 MAY 19TH-CENTURY CLARINET PERFORMING STYLES
Colin Lawson (Thames Valley University)

3 JUNE EXPRESSIVE GESTURE IN SCHUBERT SONG PERFORMANCES
Daniel Leech-Wilkinson (King's College, London)

ADMISSION

Tickets £5.00
(concessions £3.50; free seats will be available on the night on production of student ID)
Contact the British Library Events Office
T 020 7412 7332
boxoffice@bl.uk



THE WEB OF LIFE

Wildlife sounds in education by Richard Ranft

Enter the cavernous main hall of the Natural History Museum in London and your senses are immediately flooded with diverse sights and sounds: a huge dinosaur skeleton, the high roof and numerous side galleries; the muffled ambience punctuated by the cries of excited children, the shuffling and whispering of groups of visitors, and from the depths of the Ecology exhibition, the clear ringing wolf-whistle of the British Library Sound Archive's recording of the Screaming Piha, a bird of the Amazon forests.

The Sound Archive supplies many recordings of natural sounds to enhance educational exhibitions in museums, zoos and discovery centres, and educational websites and TV programmes. Our users are able to draw upon the world's richest collection of authentic sounds of wildlife and their environments. London Zoo's 'Web of Life' exhibition features our recordings of pipistrelle bats, field crickets, Hawaiian birds and seashore sounds. For a permanent exhibition entitled 'Dogs: Wolf, Hero, Myth, Friend', an in-depth look at the natural history of dogs and their ancestors, Los Angeles County

Museum in USA were able to order a comprehensive collection of different vocalisations from 10 kinds of jackals, foxes, wolves and African wild dogs.

Some exhibitors require sounds to be specially created. When Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery requested special soundscapes to accompany Ice-Age dioramas of Scottish forests and tundra, we recreated a series of 10,000 year-old soundtracks by mixing modern recordings of different component sounds that would have occurred at that time. For example, for the tundra soundscape, we mixed recordings of wind sounds from the Isle of Mull, Ptarmigan birds from the Cairngorms of Scotland, and Reindeer, Snow Bunting and Arctic Fox from Norway.

Sounds can be presented to visitors in different ways. At Gillespie Local Nature Reserve in Islington, north London, British bird sounds from the British Library can be accessed from within an interactive biodiversity program on a touchscreen computer. 'Wildwalk at Bristol', a millennium-funded multimedia centre in the renovated harbourside of Bristol old docks, introduces the world's biodiversity with sounds of rainforest animals

from our collections, video displays, botanical specimens, and free-flying butterflies and birds. It is targeted to support Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 in the science curriculum and Key Stages 2 and 3 in the geography curriculum. Commonlink is an educational website jointly developed by the Commonwealth Institute and the British Council and supported by the government's Department for Education and Skills. It features information about Commonwealth countries including text, images, and sounds of various insects, mammals and birds from Asia, Africa and Australia, supplied by us.

The Sound Archive also regularly supplies specialised sounds for educational television programmes such as the BBC's *The Natural World* series. Recent examples include unique recordings of Kingfishers to accompany close-up footage in *My Halcyon Days*, a documentary about wildlife along a Somerset river. Rare recordings of the elusive Sea Otter were supplied to the BBC for use in David Attenborough's recent TV blockbuster *The Life of Mammals*. Many of the sounds that we provide for natural history broadcasts are simply unobtainable from any other source.

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

USER PROFILE

Nigel Warburton



The philosopher Nigel Warburton is a senior lecturer at the Open University, which he joined in 1994. He is best known for his introductory philosophy books, 'Philosophy: The Basics', 'Thinking from A to Z', 'Philosophy: The Classics', 'Philosophy: Basic Readings' and 'Freedom: An Introduction with Readings'. He has a particular interest in the aesthetics of photography, which was the subject of his PhD thesis (Cambridge, 1989) and of a number of articles. He has edited and co-edited two books on the photographer Bill Brandt. In addition, he has published in the area of applied ethics. He is currently completing a biography of the architect Erno Goldfinger which will be published by Routledge in Autumn 2003, and is also working on a philosophy textbook. His latest book, 'The Art Question', which deals with the definition of art, has just been published.

When did you first visit the British Library Sound Archive?

It was while the Sound Archive was still situated in its old building in South Kensington. I don't remember how I heard about its existence, but I was researching Bill Brandt, the photographer, and came to hear some LPs discussing his work. It was just a single visit, I would think probably around 1990.

What have you been hearing during your recent visits?

Mostly tapes in the 'Architects' Lives' series, a collection of oral history interviews. I have been working on the architect Erno Goldfinger and various colleagues, friends and members of his family have been interviewed for that collection. Some of the interviews last for eight or nine tapes and I've spent hours in the listening booth, but it means that when I go to talk to the person, I've already covered an enormous

amount of ground. I listened to six hours of Peter Goldfinger, his son, speaking before I met him and there wasn't an awful lot that he had to add to that. This is an ongoing series with new interviews becoming available and every so often I come in again to catch up.

What value do recordings have for academic research?

I was initially amazed by the amount of audio material available in the areas of art, architecture and photography, which are my prime interests. I imagine there are many people working in these areas who wouldn't think of consulting recordings. The important aspect of the oral history interviews is that they bring you so close to the person. Transcripts and printed interviews cannot really equal that. It comes down to the non-verbal aspects of the interview – a pause or an inflexion that tells you of a

particular emotional response or the speaker's irritation at a certain question or evasiveness. The only frustration is that sometimes I'd like to jump in and ask a follow-up question myself!

Do you use the Sound Archive catalogue?

Having the catalogue available online is enormously helpful. In particular, the long summaries of some of the interviews enable you to pinpoint at home exactly which part of an interview, or which of the cassettes, you need to hear before you arrive. It was while I was searching the catalogue that I discovered a television programme from the series 'Late Review' that covered the National Trust's purchase of Goldfinger's home in Hampstead. Before that I hadn't realised that the NSA even kept any video material. There seem to be endless discoveries.

EVENTS

■ 'Answering the calls of nature: talking to the birds'

An illustrated talk by Jeffery Boswall
At the British Library
Contact: Nadine Svoboda (Sound Archive)
T 0207 412 7403
F 0207 412 7441
nadine.svoboda@bl.uk
1 March

■ Oral History training days

One-day courses in oral history techniques
13 March at the College of St Mark and St John, Derriford Road, Plymouth, Devon
3 April at Sheffield (venue to be announced)
22 May at University College Chichester, West Sussex
21 June at New Kings College, The University of Aberdeen
June 24 at the Planned Environment Therapy Trust, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
www.ohs.org.uk/training/

■ 'The Past in Music'

Forum for Ethnomusicology Annual Conference with keynote speaker Kay Kaufman Shelemay
At the School of Music, University of Wales, Bangor
Contact: Dr Caroline Bithell
T 01248 383760
F 01248 370297
c.bithell@bangor.ac.uk
www.shef.ac.uk/music/staff/js/BFEConf.html
1-4 May

■ Transitions

Joint annual conference of the Oral History Society with the Scottish Oral History Group
At the University of Aberdeen, Scotland
Contact: Lesley Diack (Department of History, University of Aberdeen)
T 01224 273885
h.l.diack@abdn.ac.uk
15-16 June