



A NEW FOCUS **Moving images** **in the Sound Archive**

by Luke McKernan

It may come as a surprise to some that the British Library Sound Archive has a moving image collection. Film and video recordings have long been acquired by the Archive where the sounds that they contain support the Archive's mission, and increasingly music, performance and oral history recordings are being produced on video with the rise of relatively cheap, easy-to-use equipment. The result has been a moving image collection of increasing size and importance, recognised by the creation of the post of Curator, Moving Image at the end of 2007.

There are just under 40,000 moving image titles in the Sound Archive, with a current acquisition rate of 1,600 new titles per year. By far the largest part of the collection is popular music videos, of which there are over 14,000 examples, donated by voluntary arrangement with the Musicians Union. Moving image recordings feature in the world and traditional music section, with some ethnomusicologists capturing both the

sounds and the sights of performances. Examples include field recordings of traditional music in India produced by Rolf Killius and recordings produced 1960 – 1980 by Jean Jenkins in Africa, Soviet Central Asia and South East Asia.

Video recordings are also a part of the Archive's drama and literature collection, where recordings have been made of performances by the London International Festival of Theatre, ICA Theatre, Battersea Arts Centre and the Chelsea Theatre. A particular highlight is the complete rehearsal and performance video archive of theatre company Forced Entertainment.

Moving images feature in oral history. Television producer Steve Humphries produced a number of ground-breaking television series in the 1980s and 1990s which used oral testimony to tell the social history of Britain in the twentieth century, and the Archive has all the original interview footage for his series *Labour of Love* (1993) and *Forbidden Britain* (1994). Another major oral history collection on video is 'Testimony: Video Interviews with Holocaust Survivors', 221 interviews conducted by the Sound Archive.

Between 1985 and 1999 the Sound Archive regularly recorded UK terrestrial television programmes off-air. This collection, comprising some 9,000 titles, is a little-known treasure trove. Notable series recorded from that time include *The Second Russian Revolution*, *The Late Show*, *Supersense*, *Arena*, *A Secret World of Sex*, *40 Minutes*, *Bhangra Beat*, *Reaching for the Skies*, *Without Walls*, *The South Bank Show* and *Video Diaries*. As with all Sound Archive acquisitions, the reason for selection remains the value of the sounds: music, performance, oral testimony and wildlife sounds.

The arrival of a specialist curator has brought a new focus to these collections, but the Archive, and the British Library overall, are looking further. Moving images, as with sound recordings, are not covered by existing legal deposit legislation, meaning that the British Library will be dependent on donation, purchase or special arrangements with rights-owners to build up a moving



Above Speakers at the Testimony conference held at the British Library

image collection that reflects not only the priorities of the Sound Archive but those of researchers across the entire spectrum of scholarly interests. Options for a new moving image service, including potential collaboration with external collections, are currently under discussion.

While the British Library looks to the future, the Sound Archive will continue to collect moving image materials where relevant. The number of moving image titles in the Archive is certain to grow significantly. In music, dramatic performance and oral history, both the available technology and an increased conceptual blurring between the aural and the visual will inevitably see the moving image become an ever more essential component of the Archive's holdings, rather than the interesting sideline that is currently the case.

Steps are also being made to establish a collection that relates to moving images alone. A start has been



Annie Blaylock, born Darlington, 1899, housekeeper. Recorded 1971. C707/200

'Did you go to any cinemas while you were still at school?

Yes. There was the Arcade Cinema in those days. That's where the bingo hall is now in Skinnergate. Yes, we used to go to matinees of course on an afternoon, Saturday afternoon, we used to go. And I think it used to be about three pence to get in. And of course it was all the old pictures Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford and all those.

Who did you go with to the cinema?

Well generally with my sisters, we all used to go. [We had] a penny a week pocket money every Saturday. You could get quite a lot for a penny in those days. You'd get a whole quarter of chocolate for a penny. And you could get half a penny bars of Fry's chocolate. And of course you had Spanish and Kali suckers and all.

made by collecting silent films on DVD. Silent cinema might seem a perverse choice for a sound archive, but silent films were profoundly dependent on sound for their reception. The target is to build up as comprehensive a collection as possible from around the world, then to enhance this by connecting it with other British Library resources, such as film books, film trade journals, and the Sound Archive's own oral history records (there are many interviews with people who talk about cinema in the pre-First World War period in Paul Thompson's pioneering series of interviews undertaken in the 1970s, 'Family Life and Work Experience before 1918'). This one example demonstrates how moving images can and should integrate with all that the British Library is there to do, and why it is right that the medium should be gaining new prominence in the work of the British Library Sound Archive.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

A New Poetry Recording Project

by Steve Cleary

Earlier this year, in partnership with poet Amarjit Chandan, and with the valuable assistance of the Arts Council, the Sound Archive launched a new recording project 'Between Two Worlds: Non-Anglophone Poets in England: Readings and Histories'.

The Sound Archive has extensive holdings of poets in performance, either recorded live by the Sound Archive or featuring on commercially issued CDs and LPs. Significant collections include: the master tapes of the British Council's *The Poet Speaks* series of readings and interviews covering over 200 poets, recorded between 1955 and 1975; and the National Poetry Centre readings recorded by the Sound Archive from 1979 to 1989. We currently record many of the events organized by the Poet in the City organization, which raises funds to place poets in residencies in schools.

This new initiative aims to record poets who are unrepresented or under-represented in existing Sound Archive holdings, and in other collections such as the Poetry Archive recording project spearheaded by Andrew Motion.

The primary aim is to record poets domiciled in the UK who are either bilingual or whose first language is not English. The poets are recorded in the British Library studio or in their own homes reading a selection of their poems, in English or in the language of composition followed by an English translation. Two of the poets so far recorded have chosen to have the English translations of their work read by third parties. The English translations of North Indian poet Saqi Farooqi were read by Richard Price of the British Library, and the English translations of Chilean poet Roberto Rivera-Reyes were read by the actor Peter Forbes, who could be seen earlier this year in the National Theatre productions *Never So Good* by Howard Brenton, and

Afterlife by Michael Frayn.

Each reading is followed with a short interview covering the poets' personal histories. These interviews are not only uniquely valuable as stand-alone sociological and historical documents, but also for the light they throw on the artistic work recorded, and the issue of poetry in translation generally.

Amarjit Chandan, the Library's partner in the project, was born in Nairobi but grew up in India. He has published eight collections of poems in Punjabi and has edited several anthologies of world poetry, including two collections of British Punjabi writings, *Away from Oneself* and *Lost Between Two Shores*, and has experience of translating a wide range of poets into Punjabi. Amarjit migrated to this country in 1980 and has lived in London since then. In 2005 Amarjit donated his personal audio archive to the British Library.

The other members of the advisory board for the project are Fiona Sampson (Editor *Poetry Review*), Professor Stephen Hart (Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies, UCL), Valentina Polukhina (Professor Emeritus of Russian Literature, University of Keele) and Siân Williams ('Outside In: Children's Literature in Translation' project). It is the role of the advisory board to select the 30 poets to be recorded over the three-year course of the project.

In addition to the creation of high-quality digital recordings of 30 poets reading their work, and discussing their work and their lives, which will be made permanently available to researchers and the public through the British Library's on-site listening service SoundServer, the 'Between Two Worlds' project includes an educational aspect targeted specifically at schools.

The British Library's Learning team will produce a downloadable web resource to accompany the project. The resource pack will use contextual material and background information to make the recordings accessible

to young learners and will also use the themes raised by this material, which may be translation, communication and citizenship, to introduce a number of activities. The resource will also serve as a useful tool for teachers, introducing imaginative yet simple ways to interpret the material and make use of it in the classroom.

It is expected that the material generated by the project will also be of interest to academics researching in the area of non-Anglophone poets who work in England, and of scholars active in the field of modern poetry in translation more generally.

Poets recorded to date are George Gömöri (born in Hungary), Moris Farhi (Turkey), Ravil Bukharaev (Tatarstan), Mimi Khalvati (Iran), Saqi Farooqi (India) and Roberto Rivera-Reyes (Chile).



Saqi Farooqi in the British Library studio

NEW SPOKEN WORD CDs by Richard Fairman

In October the British Library released two new sets of CDs that are the most ambitious it has ever produced. Each set – ‘British Writers’ and ‘American Writers’ – contains three CDs of historic recordings, in which eminent 20th-century writers talk about their lives and their art. Taken together, these releases form the largest survey of historic recordings by English-language authors and playwrights ever published.

The ‘British Writers’ set includes recordings of 30 eminent UK writers representing the earliest generations whose voices survive, from Arthur Conan Doyle, born in 1859, to Joe Orton, born in 1933. The recordings derive primarily from BBC broadcasts, the earliest of them dating from the 1930s. Many of the recordings are rarities and the majority have not been published before. Among the highlights are: the sole surviving recording of Virginia Woolf, published in its entirety for the first time; J R R Tolkien discussing whether he will be remembered for *The Lord of the Rings* or his academic career; Ian Fleming’s appearance on BBC Radio 4’s *Desert Island Discs*; and Harold Pinter interviewed by Kenneth Tynan, a meeting of two leading men of the theatre.

The companion ‘American Writers’ set includes 27 recordings. The majority of the recordings are again BBC broadcasts, though in this case they have been supplemented by recordings from private collections and some American radio broadcasts. Among the most notable items are: rare early recordings by Gertrude Stein, Eugene O’Neill and F Scott Fitzgerald; Raymond Chandler being interviewed by Ian Fleming, a meeting of two great thriller writers, and the only known recording of Chandler’s voice; John Steinbeck discussing his reasons for writing *The Grapes of Wrath*; and Arthur Miller talking about his marriage to Marilyn Monroe. Almost all the recordings in this collection are being published for the first time.



The Spoken Word British Writers

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How to purchase audio publications from the British Library

In person
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London NW1 2DB
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USER PROFILE

Tom Parker Bowles



Tom Parker Bowles is a food writer, author and television presenter. He has a weekly column in the 'Mail on Sunday' and a monthly column in 'Tatler' magazine. He also co-presents Market Kitchen on UKTV Food with Matthew Fort. He is the author of 'E is For Eating – An Alphabet of Greed' and 'The Year of Eating Dangerously' (Ebury Press), Tom is currently working on his latest book 'The Full English', a short history of British Food due out next year.

When did you first visit the Sound Archive?

About three months ago. I met Polly Russell, a member of the Library's Science and Collections Research Team (SSCR). Previously she had worked as a Project Worker on the National Life Stories (NLS) 'Food: From Source to Salespoint'. She showed me how to access the interviews and how to use the system. Her help and advice were invaluable.

What did you listen to when you last came?

I sat and listened to the great Joyce Molineaux talking about her life in food. It was fascinating stuff, taking in her growing up, wartime rationing and work at the Hole in The Wall in Bath. She was a great and important figure in British food and it was wonderful listening to her tell her life story. I also heard Delia Smith give her views on British food, as well as the likes of Shaun Hill and Sir Adrian Cadbury.

How does the Sound Archive help you with your work?

It was one of the best primary resources I've ever used. To sit in a booth, listening to these people talk about their life. It added an immediacy that you miss in a book, with all the inflections and accents that really bring the person to life. After a few hours listening to Joyce's dulcet tones, I felt I had a small idea of her character. The Sound Archive was not just a brilliant research source, but fascinating too. Anyone who hasn't delved in should drop everything and get in there now. It's incredible and a great help with research for my book.

How did you find our services?

The Sound Archive staff could not have been more useful. Efficient, charming and knowledgeable, they're everything you would hope for, and some.

EVENTS

■ SOUND CASES

A series of free lunchtime talks in the British Library Centre for Conservation

Tuesday 2 December 2008

Secrets of Forensic Audio: Gordon Read
Places are limited, advance booking essential

<http://boxoffice.bl.uk>

T +44(0)1937 546546

■ MUSIC AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY

Tuesday 9 December 2008

Ben Winters on Korngold and Robin Hood.
A reception will be held after this event

£6 / £4 concessions

The British Library Conference Centre, St Pancras

Online <http://boxoffice.bl.uk>

T +44 (0)1937 546546

■ ORAL HISTORY TRAINING DAYS

**20 November 2008, 11 December 2008,
14 January 2009 and 10 March 2009**

Foyle Learning Centre, British Library Centre for Conservation, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB
20 November 2008

The Gas Hall, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham, B3 3DH

Details at www.ohs.org.uk/training/training.php

■ UNLOCKING AUDIO 2:

CONNECTING WITH LISTENERS

16 17 March 2009

Unlocking Audio 2: Connecting with Listeners is an international conference marking the end of the second phase of the British Library's Archival Sound Recordings project, funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC).

A detailed programme, call for papers and registration information will be available soon

at www.bl.uk/unlockingaudio

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