

ISSUE 41 **playback** >  
Spring 2009

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**SOUND  
ARCHIVE**

# 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**

*The Sound and the Fury exhibition*

Photo: Eva Del Ray



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# WHAT'S HAPPENING



Photo: Amaryjit Chandan

Mimi Khalvati

■ The Sound Archive's Arts Council-sponsored recording project 'Between Two Worlds: Poetry and Translation' reaches the end of its first year on schedule, with ten poets recorded, reading their poetry and discussing their work and their lives. The poets recorded to date are George Gömöri (born in Hungary), Moris Farhi (Turkey), Ravil Bukharaev (Tatarstan), Mimi Khalvati (Iran), Saqi Farooqi (India), Roberto Rivera-Reyes (Chile), Moniza Alvi (Pakistan), Saradha Soobrayen (UK/Mauritian descent), Saadi Yousef (Iraq) and Esmail Khoi (Iran). The advisory committee for the project will meet again in March to discuss the next 10 poets to be approached.

■ The Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology has been a long-standing user of the wildlife collections. Based in the Zoology Department of the University of Cape Town, the institute is committed to developing a greater understanding of Africa's biological resources and researches a wide range of subjects from evolutionary ecology to conservation biology. In September we provided a selection of recordings to PhD student Graeme Oatley, who is currently working

on the phylogeography (processes controlling geographic distribution) of Cape White-eyes. In addition to vocal analysis, Graeme's research will also use molecular and morphological data to examine the systematics of these birds.

■ The Authors' Lives project has entered its second year and, thanks to funding from the Arts Council and the Booker Prize Foundation, has already added 15 life story interviews to the collection, including novelist Penelope Lively, playwright Michael Frayn, biographer Victoria Glendinning and poet James Berry. Averaging 16 hours, each recording is remarkably detailed and reflective. Two other fieldwork projects are due to get underway in the coming months: a series of interviews with people working in the water industry, supported by five UK water companies; and the first corporate oral history of Barings Bank, up to and including its collapse in 1995, which promises fascinating insights into the culture that lies behind recent economic events.

■ The Technical Services team have been taking part in the quarterly 'Caring for your Family Archive' clinics. Held in the Centre for Conservation, these sessions give one-to-one advice to members of the public on how to take care of personal memorabilia such as photographs and sound recordings. Typical enquiries include how to store recordings, where to go to have recordings transferred and how to identify different recording formats. Some extremely interesting recordings have surfaced during these sessions including a wax cylinder recording made in India dating from the 1890s. The clinics run from 10am until 4pm on the following dates: 6 June, 26 September and 5 December. Entrance is free but booking is recommended. Further details can be found at [www.bl.uk/whatson/events](http://www.bl.uk/whatson/events)

■ There has been a marked increase in broadcast use of the oral history collections over the past year. BBC

Radio 4's 'Archive Hour' featured interviews from our 'Lives on the Oil Industry' project (with Aberdeen University) in a moving documentary marking the twentieth anniversary of the Piper Alpha North Sea oil rig disaster which killed 167 people. Another edition drew on interviews about sound engineer Alan Blumlein: 'The Man Who Invented Stereo'; and an entire programme was devoted to the 'Bow Dialogues'. This remarkable set of recordings of public talks was recorded at St Mary-le-Bow church between 1964 and 1979, where, every Tuesday lunchtime, Rector Joseph McCulloch invited a well-known public figure to debate an issue of the day.

■ Nigel Bewley and Will Prentice in the Sound Archive's Technical Services department gave a talk to the Friends of the British Library entitled 'Fakes and Forgeries'. Some of the sounds in the Sound Archive are not what they appear to be: some are deliberate forgeries whilst some are accidental deceptions. Others are misinterpretations leading to wrong attribution and then there are some sounds that are so weird that they are downright misleading. The talk began with an impromptu Foley Stage (a sound effects studio) and explored some of the tricks of the trade of film dubbers and leads onto the real – or imagined – voices of Queen Victoria, Oscar Wilde, Aleister Crowley and Winston Churchill. And can a bird really sound like a building site? [www.bl.uk/supportus/friends](http://www.bl.uk/supportus/friends)

■ The wildlife section recently helped the Horniman Museum source recordings for a new interactive about sounds that animals make at different times of the day. Thirteen recordings were selected and range from a spring dawn chorus to the night time hoots of a Tawny Owl. Other species included the Swift, Blackbird, Robin, Blue Tit and Red Fox, which all produce distinctive sounds. A recording of a Pipistrelle Bat echolocating

was also selected to demonstrate sounds that are around us but cannot be heard with the human ear alone. The interactive is primarily aimed at younger visitors and it's hoped that this will help children become more aware of the natural sounds around them.



■ Two new wildlife CDs published in March provide audio guides to birds around Britain. 'Coastal Birds' offers a comprehensive collection of vocalisations regularly found along the shores of the British Isles. The 50 tracks include a range of seabirds, waders, wildfowl and even a songbird or two. 'Countryside Birds' presents 70 species that call the British countryside home from songbirds and game birds to birds of prey.

■ The Sound Archive recently launched a series of lunchtime talks on various aspects of the world of sounds in the Centre for Conservation. The first fascinating talk, held on 2 February, was on the Secrets of Forensic Audio and was given by Gordon Reid who is Managing Director of CEDAR Audio, a Cambridge-based audio restoration company whose forensic clients include the Metropolitan Police and the FBI. Richard Ranft, Head of the Sound Archive said: 'It is fantastic to be able to offer these free lunchtime talks on sound and we are grateful to Gordon for agreeing to give the first talk. We hope to offer further talks in 2009 on themes such as musical performance and artistic interpretation, the restoration of recordings and the science of sound.'

## SPEAKERS' CORNER

Steve Cleary, Curator of Drama and Literature, Sound Archive, introduces the British Library's current Digital Gallery exhibition *The Sound and the Fury: The Power of Public Speaking*.

The Sound and the Fury is an interactive audio resource presenting the spoken word in perhaps its most forceful guise: that of public speaking. Over 200 audio selections offer a historical review of public speaking, oratory and the art of persuasion from William Gladstone in 1888 to Barack Obama in 2008. The source material was drawn from BBC broadcasts, commercially issued recordings and the British Library's own unique audio holdings.

Selections range in tone from the raucous to the majestic, through sections devoted to historical recordings; awards acceptance speeches; stage rhetoric; oratory and debate; UK and US political speeches; royal broadcasts; war; sporting commentary; and humour.

As curator of the audio content I aimed to balance the relatively familiar (Neville Chamberlain's speech at Heston Airport on returning from Munich; Winston Churchill's wartime radio broadcasts; John F. Kennedy's 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech at the Berlin Wall) with material drawn from the British Library's unique collections that many may not have heard before. This latter category includes recordings from the Cambridge University Union debates; recordings from the weekly dialogues at St Mary le Bow church in the City of London; live theatre and comedy recorded by the Sound Archive; and British Library Auditorium events.

Some of the more unusual selections include an ex hangman speaking at Cambridge Union in favour of capital punishment; Ken Campbell's translation of the sound and fury speech from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into Pidgin English; and Muhammad Ali's adaptation of the friends, Romans, countrymen speech from *Julius Caesar* (I come to bury Liston, not to praise him).

The exhibition is open now and runs until Christmas.



Above *The Sound and the Fury* exhibition  
Photo: Eva Del Ray

# ARCHIVAL SOUND RECORDINGS

## Access to Audio for the Google Generation by Ginevra House

For the last five years, the Archival Sound Recordings project has been exploring new ways to create access to the vast wealth of music, spoken word and environmental sounds held in the British Library Sound Archive. Since 2004, this JISC-funded project has been selecting significant audio collections from the Sound Archive, digitising them, clearing rights for academic use and beyond, and making them available online.

Over the course of these five years, the project has digitised 36,000 recordings and pioneered new approaches to clearing copyright for academic and public use. It has contributed to the creation of global standards for metadata, helping to define how contextual information about recordings, such as recording date, engineer, synopses and technical information should be preserved along with the digital copy.

The web team have developed a searchable and browseable website, making tens of thousands of recordings and their descriptions visible to search engines like Google. It has also been leading the way in exploring how 'web 2.0' technologies can be employed so that users can interact with the site, enrich the information currently available on recordings with tags and contextual commentary – new features that will be appearing on the site in the next few months.

### Who can access the recordings?

#### Members of the Public

Anyone can listen to the recordings from British Library Reading Rooms without booking an appointment. A Reader's Pass is required for all services based in the Reading Rooms.

In addition, over 2,000 of the recordings are available to the public online. These include classical music, accents and dialects, British wildlife, Holocaust testimonies, ethnographic wax cylinders and Ugandan field recordings.

#### UK Further and Higher Education

Thanks to funding from the JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) all recordings are available for free to licensed UK higher and further education institutions. Staff and students can log in using their Shibboleth or Open Athens password and play or download recordings to cut, loop, transcribe, embed and otherwise repurpose for academic use. Librarians should contact [asr@bl.uk](mailto:asr@bl.uk) to request a license.

### What's there?

Archival Sound Recordings delivers a cross-section of music, spoken word and environmental sounds from the Sound Archive, including offerings from every subject area. Highlights include:

- **Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G minor, op. 23** – explore interpretations by 16 masters, including the legendary Alfred Cortot. *From Classical Music*
- **Dame Elizabeth Frink** – the artist discusses the shocked reaction at the unveiling of her giant nude sculpture with flying goggles in Manchester Airport. *From Art and Design Interviews*
- **Peter Cook** – the iconic comedian, who played a suave Satan in the 1967 film *Bedazzled*, discusses god and the



Above Frédéric Chopin  
Right Beryl Bryden

devil with Rector James McCulloch. *From St Mary Le Bow Public Debates*

- **Ness Sound Portrait** – an audio journey depicting everyday sounds of nature, homelife, work and recreation in rural Scotland. *From Soundscapes*
- **Anansi and the Ghost Wrestlers** – a dramatised story about the famous spider god. *From African Writers' Club*
- **Pool frogs (*Rana lessonae*)** – do frogs have accents? Compare recordings from England, Albania and Estonia to find out. *From Amphibians*
- **Beryl Bryden** – one of the most flamboyant English jazz singers, known as Queen of the Washboard describes meeting Louis Armstrong. *From Oral History of Jazz in Britain*
- **Maurice Wilkins** – the Nobel Prize winner describes the research that led to the discovery of DNA's double helix structure. *From Eminent Scientists*



## HOW IS IT BEING USED?

By making rare and often unpublished primary source material available online for the first time, Archival Sound Recordings has been opening up new areas of research for academics, teachers, researchers and students.

### Case Study 1

**Further Education teacher – art  
Amanda Broadley, Photography Tutor,  
Joseph Priestley College**

When photography tutor Amanda Broadley discovered the Art and Design Interviews she decided to use them to create a learning package introducing her Level 2 students to a project researching famous photographers.

'I found the audio fantastic to work with,' she said. 'When students do their research on the internet, more often than not its American photographers that they find. Archival Sound Recordings was good in that it showcased British photographers. The realism of it inspired students and encouraged them to source other material beyond Google searches. It also placed the photographs in context, which you don't get from Google.'

Amanda created a Power Point presentation that can sit on a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) allowing students to work through it independently. The package showcases three photographers and included examples of their work and excerpts from interviews. She found the audio helped students engage with the subject material.

'These interviews are straight from the horse's mouth – photographers and artists talking about their own work and influences. As a tutor I maybe too often stand there and give my opinion about somebody's work. Listening to interviews allows

students to hear from the photographer themselves what's behind the images.

This is a fantastic way to bring artists' work to life for students.'



Amakondere trumpet players

### Case Study 2

**Postgraduate researcher – ethnomusicology  
Samuel Kahunde, PhD student, Sheffield University**

In 1967, the central government of Uganda abolished the historic Bantu kingdoms that had for centuries formed the regional administrations of the country. Out went the kingdoms, out went the kings, and out with them went generations of musical and cultural lore.

In 1993, the government restored the kingdoms, and the reinstated King of Bunyoro-Kitara is now tackling the daunting task of recreating the institutions, articles and music of the regional heritage.

After discovering old recordings of this music in the Klaus Wachsmann Uganda collection on Archival Sound Recordings, Samuel Kahunde decided to base his PhD thesis on the subject. In a fieldwork trip last June, Samuel visited the royal court to discuss the recovery of this music with the King of Bunyoro-Kitara.

He found that many kinds of music are now extinct – the instruments may be preserved, but nobody knows how to play them any more. Other musical forms are

still alive, but have suffered greatly from the 26 year gap, with only a few elderly practitioners left, trying to teach young musicians who have never experienced how the music should sound.

The Wachsmann recordings are providing a pathway to rediscover the music, according to Samuel. 'I am looking at issues of preservation and authenticity in the revival of the royal music of Bunyoro. I get information through listening to the music recorded from different regions of Uganda, allowing me to compare the music across diverse cultures,' says Samuel. 'They are also useful in making comparisons between traditional music in the 1940s and later periods. This has provided me with new leads for research.'

Samuel also worked with a group of young Amakondere trumpet players, playing those Wachsmann recordings and allowing them to hear for the first time how the music used to be played. The musicians have asked for copies of the recordings in order to study the music in more depth.

On his next trip to Uganda Samuel will continue to work closely with the Royal Court. It's a huge job, and one that looks set to continue well beyond the confines of a PhD.

### Case Study 3

**University academic and artist – electronic music**  
**Kingsley Ash, Lecture, Leeds Metropolitan University**  
The United Reform Church in Keld, a remote corner of the Yorkshire Dales was brought to life last summer with a sound installation by Kingsley Ash for the 2008 Swaledale Festival.

The installation used recordings from the Accents and Dialects dating back to the 1950's, melded with folk songs and the composer's own field recordings from the area. The resulting audio sculpture integrated

recognisable words with fragments, phonemes, inflections and tones extracted from speech.

'Some of the recordings I made were made with locals whose families had been there a long time, particularly in the remote villages in the top at the Dale,' says Kingsley. 'Their accents still sounded very much like those in the old recordings from the British Library. Generally, though, people are no longer so isolated and accents are less extreme today.'

The installation was well received, especially in the village where it ran for two weeks through the festival. 'People in the village were very interested – it's not the sort of thing they usually have access to.'

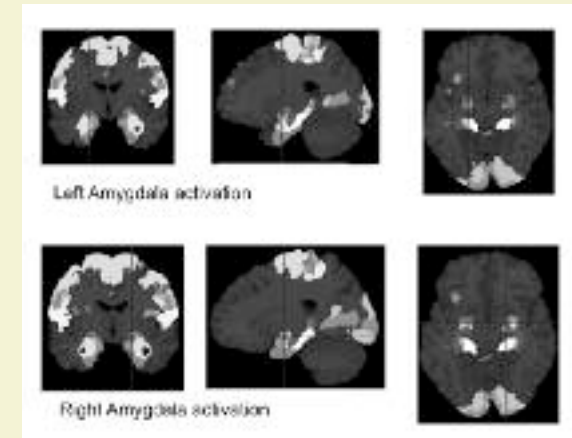
'The idea of juxtaposing old and new recordings came from finding the Accents and Dialects collection on Archival Sound Recordings. The resource is very good – it's easy to access and there's all kinds of material there. It's useful not just for this kind of artistic use, but for social research, exploring the changing times we live in, and also for music technology, allowing researchers to compare old and new recordings.'

### Case study 4

**Research Fellow – Cognitive Psychology**  
**Dr Amy Irwin – MRC Institute of Hearing Research**  
**Urban Soundscapes and the Brain**

If asked to think about urban soundscapes, the majority of people imagine noisy traffic, sirens, loud parties and other intrusive, undesirable sounds of the city. The Positive Soundscapes Project has set out to challenge this negative perception of the sounds of the city. The project brings together researchers from a wide range of disciplines – from social science to psychoacoustics to sound art – with the aim of exploring how the auditory environment affects people living within it.

One such expert is research fellow Dr Amy Irwin



fMRI scans: preliminary results showed activity in the amygdala (marked by cross) whilst listening to affective soundscapes

from the MRC Institute of Hearing Research. She set out to assess the impact on the human brain of sounds perceived as either pleasant or unpleasant.

Hunting for sounds of the urban environment, Dr Irwin found a range of recordings from Soundscapes and British Wildlife Recordings on Archival Sound Recordings. 'The website is very user friendly, and being able to download the clips directly was a great time saver,' says Irwin. 'The variety of sounds available was also useful. Combined with the soundscapes I found from other private sources Archival Sound Recordings provided for all of my needs.'

Participants were asked to rate 150 recordings for 'pleasantness', whilst undergoing an functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scan. Results showed that ideas of 'pleasantness' varied on an individual level: some sounds such as vomiting were universally rated as unpleasant, while others, like urban fox calls, varied depending on the individual. However, sounds which evoked a strong emotional response – either pleasant or unpleasant – all resulted in activity in the amygdala

region of the brain, which is known to be associated with emotion.

Understanding how the human brain responds to different types of urban sound is an essential part of the Positive Soundscapes Project, helping it to devise ways to incorporate positive soundscapes into urban planning and design.

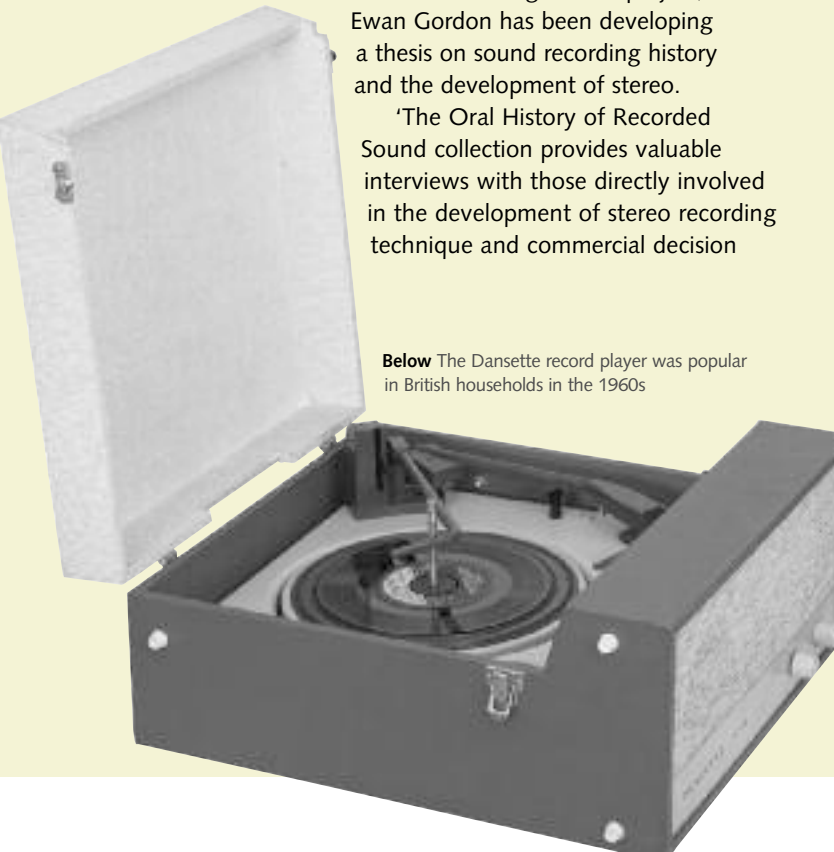
### Case Study 5

#### Postgraduate researcher – audio archiving Ewan Gordon, University of York

As part of his work with the University of York Sound Archive's digitisation project, Ewan Gordon has been developing a thesis on sound recording history and the development of stereo.

'The Oral History of Recorded Sound collection provides valuable interviews with those directly involved in the development of stereo recording technique and commercial decision

**Below** The Dansette record player was popular in British households in the 1960s



### How to use Archival Sound Recordings

The ASR website is at: [www.bl.uk/sounds](http://www.bl.uk/sounds) where information about the recordings is freely available along with over 2,000 recordings now available to the public on-line

To request a licence a Higher of Further Education institution should contact [asr@bl.uk](mailto:asr@bl.uk)

making, says Ewan. As periods of technical experimentation, the processes are often poorly documented and these first hand accounts provide an invaluable insight into the methods employed,' he says.

The recordings document a swathe of developments across the 20th century, from early

experiments by Arthur C. Keller and Alan Blumlein in the 1920s and 30s, to the possibilities for multi-track magnetic tape explored by The Beatles. It also provides valuable insight into the commercial exploitation of new audio technologies, through interviews with Sir Joseph Lockwood (former Chairman of EMI), Kenneth Townsend MBE (former sound engineer at Abbey Road) and iconic record producer George Martin.

Ewan is currently in the second year of a PhD, and the Oral History of Recorded Sound has helped shape the direction of his thesis. 'The collection has allowed me to make valuable connections between the often lesser documented technical staff and place their roles in context. This has opened new avenues for investigation and has guided and prioritized my research planning at other British archives such as EMI and Decca.'



## USER PROFILE

### Lawrence Bailey



*Lawrence Bailey is a Market and Social Research Consultant who founded Lawrence F. Bailey & Associates in 1997 as a Decision Resource Consultancy. He divides his time by working also as a Senior Lecturer at Leeds Business School which is part of Leeds Metropolitan University*

#### When did you first visit the Sound Archive?

I first visited the Sound Archive on one occasion in the 1970s when it was based in South Kensington. I found this building fairly inaccessible. I moved to Leeds in 1997, frequently visiting London to carry out consultancy work. I often had a couple of hours to spare when in London and started visiting the Sound Archive at St Pancras. I really like the new building and find it strangely uplifting.

#### What do you listen to when you visit?

I grew up in a household with parents who loved popular music and jazz and listened to it all of the time. I inherited this love and decided that I would like to learn more about the subject. The Sound Archive's collection has enabled me to do so. My starting point was a fabulous book called *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* by Charlie Gillett. I began by listening to the tracks which he felt were significant and then branched out from there. My research roughly covers the period from 1955 when the sudden impact of rock

and roll took place until 1987. This was the point at which CDs became the main sound carrier, pre-teens became an important market sector and the radically different genre of rap music attained prominence.

#### What is the reason for your research?

I visit the Sound Archive purely for the joy and pleasure that the research provides me with although I may turn my research into a book in the future. This may have to wait until I retire. Although I plan to make few more visits I have more or less completed what I set out to achieve. One of the main pleasures has been discovering new archive tracks. My brother and I collected 78s when we were very young and one of the discs we used to have is a track called 'Sidewalks of Cuba'. My research led me to the 'The Cuban Havana Band' – British musicians who without a doubt made the best version.

#### How did you find our services?

I particularly enjoy your open access collection of printed materials. It is wonderful to have so many reference collections on open shelves. I discovered that the first record featuring an electronic instrument to appear in the UK pop chart was Frank Chacksfield's 'Little Red Monkey' in April 1953, which made use of the clavoline. It was featured in the BBC TV serial of the same name, and I was able to consult the *Radio Times* from 1953 to get more details and then to look at copies of *Melody Maker* from the same period when adverts for clavolines and all sorts of electronic equipment began to appear.

## EVENTS

### ■ THE ART OF GREAT SPEECHES

Tuesday 7 April 2009

Panel discussion including Philip Collins, former Chief Speech Writer to Tony Blair and Tony Allen, performer, author and political figure.

£6/£4 concessions

The British Library Conference Centre,  
St Pancras

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

### ■ ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH FORUM FOR ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

16 – 19 April 2009

Popular Music Studies Unit,  
Liverpool John Moores University

Theme: Music, Culture and Globalisation

Further details: [www.bfe2009.net](http://www.bfe2009.net)

### ■ ORAL HISTORY TRAINING DAYS

20 April 2009

Weston Park Museum, Western Bank,  
Sheffield, S10 2TP

22 April 2009, 12 May 2009, 17 June 2009,  
21 June 2009 and 9 September 2009

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

Further details:

[www.ohs.org.uk/training/training.php](http://www.ohs.org.uk/training/training.php)

### ■ SOUND PROPERTY?

28 – 29 May 2009

Investigating the legal status of sound recordings. An interdisciplinary conference on music and copyright. University of Salford  
Further details:

[www.adelphi.salford.ac.uk/adelphi/p/?s=23&pid=90](http://www.adelphi.salford.ac.uk/adelphi/p/?s=23&pid=90)

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