

CD AND DVD REVIEWS

The Collection of Father Franz Mayr: Zulu Recordings 1908. Sound documents from the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The complete historical collections 1899-1950. Series 10. Dietrich Schüller, general editor. Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften OAW CD 25, 2007. ISBN 978-3-7001-3827-3. Two audio CDs, one CD-ROM with 64 page booklet.

This publication offers an extremely valuable insight into Zulu musical traditions and practices in the first decade of the 20th century. Forty-six recordings are included over two CDs representing “prayers and European hymns”, “music of Christian Zulus”, and “Traditional contents – weddings – hunting; war – history”. The remaining two music tracks are miscellaneous pieces sung in Baca, a dialect of SiSwati. Each track is presented with extensive commentary including original lyrics, translations, and contextual information. Biographical notes on the recordist, Franz Mayr (1865–1914), and a full description of his work and research on Zulu music are written by Clemens Gütl, who first began researching the man in 2003–4. August Schmidhofer provides “musicological remarks on Mayr’s recordings” breaking them down according to their “underlying tonal system and polyphonic structure” employing the following categories: European hymns; new compositions employing European musical techniques; autochthonous songs in anhemitonic pentatonic; autochthonous songs in hemitonic pentatonic (mostly *amahubo* ceremonial songs).

Father Franz Mayr was a Tyrolean priest who arrived in South Africa in 1890. He worked primarily in KwaZulu-Natal, mainly in and around Pietermaritzburg. For three years from 1909 he worked to reopen the St Triashill mission in present day Zimbabwe. Following a short spell of a few months in 1912 back in Europe, he returned to Africa, this time to start the first Catholic mission, St Joseph’s, near Bremersdorp in Swaziland. Having devoted his entire working life to the missionary enterprise in Africa – being noted for his affinity for a range of African languages and enthusiasm for African music and cultures – Mayr was one morning fatally, near his mission in Swaziland, stabbed in the neck for his new coat and the loose change in his pocket.

The recordings represent some of the very earliest attempts at documenting music performances, following the invention of portable recording technology in the 1870s and the first successful use of it in the field by the folklorist, Walter Fewkes, in 1890. These are not the earliest Zulu recordings, however. Earlier recordings were made by Dr Felix von Luschan in 1905 and by Professor Dr Krämer in 1906, both collections being housed at the Berlin Phonogrammarchiv. Sadly these collections have not survived well due to mildew and the audio is to all intents and purposes lost to us. Of course, cylinder recordings, even where they have not been attacked by mould, are not noted for their hi-fidelity. The ratio of surface noise to musical signal inherent in the technology, plus the ineptitude of many early recordists to fully understand how to make a good recording with the

machine, often leaves the modern listener wondering whether there is anything on the cylinder at all. Indeed Mayr is to be congratulated on his recording technique. Many of the recordings feature group song and are very well-balanced in the face of technology that favoured solo voice. On one of the recordings, for example, the singers' footwork (light stamping) is even audible (CD: 1, track 24). A remarkable achievement.

The value of good documentation is demonstrated in this publication. The CD-ROM presents all Mayr's original handwritten documentation as well as his typed comments and transcriptions as digital images. Analysing these, Gütl extracts information on performers, including their names, ages and places of birth. He also summarises information on genres and song types. Mayr's text, "A short study on Zulu music" originally published in the *Annals of the Natal Government Museum* 1/3:257-267, is included on the CD-ROM as a pdf file. This is ethnomusicology as a science: careful presentation of the facts in their original form, making for open and transparent interpretation. Von Luschan and Krämer, by contrast, were not as meticulous with their documentation as was Mayr. In fact, the extensive notes with this publication by Clemens Gütl suggest that not only did Von Luschan and Krämer omit information on language or content of the songs; they also neglected to note anything about the performers. "There is no proof", therefore, "that their informants were indeed Zulu people" (p.25). Without detailed documentation such as Mayr provided, the recordings can have only a limited value.

The Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences is doing us a great service in making their historic collections available. Previous editions in the series have focussed on recordings by somewhat better known researchers, such as Rudolf Pöch (1870-1921) arguably Austria's most renowned anthropologist and celebrated as major figure in the history of 20th-century European anthropology. The publication of recordings from his early expeditions to Papua New Guinea (OEAW PHA CD 9, 2000) and the Kalahari (OEAW PHA CD 19, 2003) are additions to existing knowledge of him. Franz Mayr, by contrast, remained largely unknown until Clemens Gütl published on his life as a Tyrolean missionary in 2004.¹ This publication is more than a CD of music, therefore. It stands as a holistic biography of a man, while at the same time offering insight into a historical period for which we have few avenues to explore.

Within Ethnomusicology, the idea of using another scholar's materials as the basis of research is not frequently supported. The practice became unfashionable as methodologies and labels such as "armchair anthropology" and "comparative musicology" were replaced by "participant observation" and "anthropology of music" and/or "ethnography of musical performance".² What is interesting about the Mayr publication is that it offers a model for research that takes an archival resource (collection of recordings) as a

¹ Gütl, Clemens (ed.). (2004). "Adieu ihr lieben Schwarzen": Gesammelte Schriften des Tiroler Afrikamissionars Frans Mayr (1865-1914). Wien, Köln, Wiemar: Böhlau.

² See Merriam, Alan (1964). *The anthropology of music*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, and McLeod, Norma & Marcia Herndon, (1980). *The ethnography of musical performance*. Norwood: Norwood Editions.

starting point. We find we can learn a great deal about history and musical practices from resources created by others.

Mayr's motivation for studying Zulu music and making the recordings were indeed, of his time. He was concerned with vanishing cultures just like other folklorists, budding anthropologists and explorers such as Walter Fewkes and Alfred Cort Haddon. Mayr claimed: "It is certainly high time for such a study, as European music is rapidly penetrating into every part of the country, and harmonicas, concertinas, etc., are taking the place of the original primitive instruments" (p.21). The editor of *Anthropos*, Father Wilhelm Schmidt, suggested that Mayr be sent a phonograph to assist him with his documentation of musical traditions, in order to preserve them for future generations. Scholars today are often quick to pass over resources compiled during earlier periods, assessing them as colonialist or imperialist. In many respects political and ideological motivations have, thankfully, become more equitable. We are, however, still taken with similar concerns. The historic collections of the Phonogrammarchiv were included into the world register of UNESCO's Memory of the World programme in 1999. Stemming from the concern that "everyday irreplaceable parts of memory disappear forever", the programme aims "to guard against collective amnesia calling upon the preservation of the valuable archive holdings and library collections all over the world ensuring their wide dissemination".³ Scholarly research based on archival materials is still highly relevant and this publication is an excellent example of what can be achieved.

Janet Topp Fargion, British Library Sound Archive

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Poetry and Languid Charm, 2007: Swahili Music From Tanzania and Kenya – From the 1920s to the 1950s. Topic Records Ltd. - TSCD 936. Compiled by Janet Topp Fargion, Curator, World and Traditional Music Section, British Library Sound Archive. One compact disc. Booklet (15 pp.) with notes by Janet Topp Fargion and photographs.

In keeping with its aim for a wide dissemination of the music and information held in its considerable archive, the British Library Sound Archive presents a compilation of Swahili music from Tanzania and Kenya recorded from 1920 to 1950. The name of the compilation – *Poetry and languid charm*, as explained in the booklet text, is taken from a direct quote from recordist Hugh Tracey's article "Recording Tour, May to November 1950 East Africa", published in the *African Music Society Newsletter*. After a particularly successful tour to East Africa in 1950 during which Tracey recorded over 1000 tracks (six of which are included in the compilation), he stated that he was impressed with the musical feeling of the Swahilis and that "Mombasa, like Dar es Salaam, proved to be a place of poetry and languid charm" (Tracey 1951:50). This is a fitting title as the CD is mainly a collection of the popular genre of Swahili music called *taarab* which features

³ http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1538&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (Accessed 20 June 2007)