

REVIEWS

Early Field Recordings: A Catalogue of Cylinder Collections at the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music, edited by Anthony Seeger and Louise S. Spear. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987. xviii plus 198 pp. (Reprinted from *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* Vol.7 No. 1/2 1988 by permission)

This book contains a catalogue of some of the 7 000 recordings made between 1893 and 1938 on the earliest of sound-recording mediums, the Edison cylinder, and presently held in the Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University. It has been published "to make the unique recordings at the Archives of Traditional Music more widely known and more easily available to researchers" (p.xviii). The volume includes detailed instructions on how to use the catalogue, explaining the system used, access points, the use of indexes, the degrees of restriction on use, and so forth; and an introduction to ethnographic cylinder recordings, an excellent encapsulation of their history and technology, and of the trials undergone by archive staff in their attempts to clean, repair, copy and identify so many remnants of this past technology.

It is interesting to know that the grooves in cylinder recordings were modulated up and down, not side to side as in modern discs. As the authors point out, each time one plays back a cylinder recording the quality becomes noticeably worse; which is why they were played back with a non-intrusive laser apparatus. When transferring the cylinders to tape, it was quite rightly decided not to filter the sound in any way, working on the principle that the researchers are free to do this later from their own tapes as they like – for a sound, once deleted, is irretrievable. The authors remark that the cylinder machines did not run at a fixed speed, but were adjustable according to the quality required, and according to how much one needed to fit on to a cylinder. So, unless the recordist sounded a tuning fork at the beginning (which few apparently did) it is a matter of guesswork as to how fast one should play back the cylinder. It may be a salutary thought for today, a mere one hundred years after the start of sound recording, and as we progress to compact discs and digital sound, to think that these too will be shelved in archives of the future as examples of primitive recording technology.

The catalogue itself (one hundred and seven pages), lists collections rather than individual cylinders by accession number, and provides basic information as far as this is available – for example, the collector's name, date, place, cultural group, estimate of sound quality, degree of restriction on use, and so on. The recordings themselves are largely remote from Africa: there is one item listed each for South Africa (recorded in Johannesburg between 1900 and 1913; unknown culture groups, unknown subjects), Mozambique, and Malawi. The remainder of the recordings are primarily from North America (American Indian; approximately 132 culture groups), from Africa (mostly West Africa, Zaire, Tanzania, and scattered elsewhere; approximately 40 culture groups), and progressively fewer for Eurasia (29), Oceania (17), and South America (6). There are also four indexes, enabling the reader to look up material under names, culture groups, subjects, and geographic names.

If the researcher is interested in early recordings of certain cultural groups, the story of a conscientious rescue and conservation effort, or in a cautionary tale for his fieldwork today, he will find this an excellent book in every way. Cautionary tale?: "...ethnographers did not always take great care to document what they were recording. Researchers often find the field experience so vivid at the time that they assume they will remember when, where, and what they record" (p.11). But do they? Of course not! Looking through the catalogue, the one word found in the majority of entries is "unknown" – unknown location, unknown culture group, unknown subject, and so forth. The authors in many cases had to clutch at information from any source possible, such as faint pencil notes on cylinder boxes (many of them mixed up), announcements on recordings, and even graphology and mycology. The lesson should be obvious: it is almost impossible for a field researcher, even with our present technology, and whether amateur or professional, to over-document his recordings – you would not wish your work labelled "unknown" in a hundred year's time for want of proper descriptive notes and labelling. This was true in the days of the cylinder, and it still seems important today, particularly when we think of the cassette, with the severely limited space it offers for written identification.

There are only two complaints about Seeger and Spear's book. One is that archivists seem to use the word "archives" as an uncomfortably singular noun: "...the materials...that the Archives has (*sic*) preserved". Secondly, the catalogue was computer assembled, and the featureless typewritten print-out does not do justice to this important material. It would have been well worth the trouble and expense of having it typeset.

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The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments. Edited by Stanley Sadie. London: Macmillan Press; New York: Grove's Dictionary of Music, 1984. [Vol.I, xxvi, 805p; Vol.II, xiii, 982p; Vol.III, xiii, 921p]

The publishers of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* have offered to the reading public a compendium on musical instruments. For libraries, institutions and scholars interested in the subject, *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (GDMI) is a compelling work. For those with casual interest, it will serve as a reference aid alongside others presently available, such as Sibyl Marcuse's *Musical Instruments: A Comprehensive Dictionary*, Anthony Baines' *Musical Instruments Through the Ages*, Curt Sach's *History of Musical Instruments*, and related works, including the appropriate entries in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Ethnomusicologists, musicologists, and scholars in related disciplines should consider GDMI as a valuable prospective addition to their collections.

Drawing extensively upon *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980) as a basic source, the appeal of this new work lies in the attempt to consolidate within