
THE INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY OF AFRICAN MUSIC

A most important step forward in the research into African music has been made this year by the establishment in Africa of a library which is entirely devoted to the work of presenting pressed recordings, fully classified, for this special branch of African study.

The Library has been registered on a non-profit basis and has received its initial support from the Nuffield Foundation, which has generously given a grant to cover the administrative costs of the organisation for the first two and a half years. A grant from the South African Department of Education has also made it possible to obtain certain essential apparatus and to employ a Cambridge anthropologist/musician to concentrate upon the work of classification with the eventual objective of writing the much needed text-books on this subject suitable for educational and social welfare purposes.

The ground work for the new organisation has been accomplished during the past seven years through private enterprise and the Library will be established upon the nucleus of the collection of recordings made by African Music Research during that period. A practical system of classification has been formulated and with the co-operation of the Linguistic section of the Department of Bantu Studies of the University of the Witwatersrand a satisfactory numerical code system for African languages has been achieved.

All persons recording African music throughout the continent, including the staffs of many radio stations, private research workers and others, are cordially invited to contribute to the work of the Library and to benefit from the facilities which the Library can offer in the way of processing, pressing and publishing the results of their work. Co-operation from all over Africa will guarantee to all those concerned with the social uses of African music, the schools and universities, the broadcasting studios and social services, a constant supply of the best material Africa can offer. As a non-profit organisation the Library can offer to its members and participants a valuable service at minimum cost to all concerned. The staff of the Library will be in the position to give expert attention to any problem connected with the subject, and as experience widens, authoritative advice to teachers, entertainers and social workers who might be glad of practical assistance of this nature.

The Library has been launched by the African Music Society, a special Council having been set up to ensure continuity of policy and control. It has invited a number of well-known and responsible persons in the vicinity of Johannesburg to form a Committee of Control, the Chairman of which was until recently Under-Secretary for Native Affairs in the Union of South Africa. Representation upon the Committee is invited from all African territories including Belgian, French and Portuguese colonies as well as the British territories, to ensure that local problems connected with the musical side of African social studies may be assured full attention by the library.

It is the first organisation of its kind in Africa and already several institutions in Africa have expressed their satisfaction that at long last this gap in our study of African sociology will be adequately filled.

The headquarters of the International Library are situated fifteen miles from Johannesburg, where the offices of the African Music Research have been taken over, complete with equipment and stocks of recordings. The choice of Johannesburg as the centre from which to operate the library has been made for several excellent reasons, the most important of which on the material side are the availability of industrial plant and technical assistance of high quality for the processing of records and for repair of equipment, printing facilities, and speedy communications with all parts of Africa by airmail service. On the personal side, the presence of many suitable persons who are able to volunteer for the honorary task of acting upon the controlling committee and for the recruitment of staff. The African Music Society is also centred here and the Council is drawn exclusively from its local members.

The success of the Library will undoubtedly depend upon the degree of personal interest and co-operation it is able to achieve from the many recording units throughout the continent. The commercial companies are, naturally, primarily concerned with those restricted aspects of African music and entertainment which may be regarded as "best sellers" in the more affluent sections of the community, particularly in the larger towns surrounding mines and industrial areas, but they, too, are invited to assist the Library by submitting items which are of social importance regardless of their strictly commercial value. The Library itself must concentrate upon the more important social music and those allied activities which are both the heart of African musical genius and the constant concern of educationalists and broadcasters, musicians, social workers and students of anthropology and linguistics everywhere. Accurate translations of songs are of the first importance to sociologists and administrators alike.

The Library will classify its publications in such a way as to ensure that each section of the public requiring its services will be able to obtain immediately that selection of items which has a bearing upon its special field. To this end the Library will be subdivided under sections which will apply particularly to the following requirements:—

- Entertainment* . . . Items calculated to entertain locally within a given area, or more broadly, outside its own immediate borders.
- Anthropological* . . . All genuine examples of social music classified accurately according to their tribal or linguistic categories, and for their various social significances, regardless of their potential entertainment value.
- Linguistic* Examples of recordings which give clear renderings of any African language or dialect, such as stories, legends and praise recitations.
- Musicology* Typical examples selected for their clear exposition of the structure and pattern of African music making, with special reference to students of African composition.
- Musical* Those items which may be considered to be representative of the original work of the most competent musicians of Africa on the one hand and of their adaptations of foreign material on the other.
- Extra-African* A special section will be devoted to African-derived music from other countries, such as the calypsos of the Antilles and the modern dance forms of North and South America which owe their origin in part to African musical characteristics.
- Reference Library* . . . Those items which on account of technical limitations cannot be reproduced upon pressed discs and issued with the bulk of the Library publications will be available for study at the headquarters of the Library.

Individual items may be classified under more than one heading according to their estimated value in any specific direction. Thus, an item calculated to be entertaining only within a certain tribe or language group may be of particular interest both to linguists and musicians also. Every item in the Library will, in addition, bear its normal classification under the three headings of "Type of material and its social use", "the instruments used" and the "language employed." Many other details will appear on the card index system which will accompany all the Library's published recordings including the origin of the items, the names and addresses of the performers and of those who recorded the material, the composer, if known, and remarks which have a bearing upon the composition and its structure. In this way the authenticity of the recordings will be guaranteed and students will be able to verify each detail.

In effect, the work of the Library will be to provide, with the assistance of its friends everywhere, an authoritative source of recorded African music and a guide to the theory behind the music. It will represent for the African Music Society the essential data upon which the whole phenomenon of African music may be assessed. Music, of all the arts, is the most elusive and unsatisfactory to describe except in terms of its own medium. In short, no study of African music, and all that that means to present-day African society and to future generations, could be complete without such a Library, readily available in published form to all who are interested in its many applications, wherever they may be.

We are confident that the services of the International Library will be greatly

appreciated by sensitive Africans throughout the continent and by the friends of Africa everywhere, once the function of co-operation is in full swing and the Library can claim to be fully inter-territorial through the scope and quality of its publications.

Full details will be supplied to anyone who is interested either in supplying original recordings or in purchasing selections from the output of the Library. *African Music*, the Journal of the African Music Society, will report constantly upon the progress of the undertaking.

Applications for further grants, and for bursaries for workers connected with the Library, are being made both on the academic side of the study and also for the necessary capital funds needed to cover the cost of publication and to build up adequate supplies of records for all requirements throughout Africa. Contributions towards the work of the Library, in the form of legacies, bursaries, gifts or loans in cash or kind, will be welcomed from all quarters and will be fully acknowledged by the African Music Society.

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