
INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY OF AFRICAN MUSIC

With the end of 1958, the Library has now successfully completed its first experimental five year period. This was made possible through the generosity of various donors including the Nuffield Foundation, the Copper Mines of Northern Rhodesia, the Diamond Mines of Southern Africa, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, The Union Minière du Haut Katanga, several Corporate Members including the Gold Mines of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, the South African Department of Arts and Science, Municipalities and other Industries and a number of Ordinary Members.

The Library has accomplished the preparatory work it set out to achieve by the end of 1958; in brief, not only to initiate the study of African music but (a) to establish a centre for the collection of a Library or Archive of authentic African recordings, and (b) to make the results of its activities available in practical form to official, scientific, recreational and welfare organisations.

STUDY

At its headquarters at Msaho, Roodepoort, the Library has in its possession and on loan what is believed to be the largest collection of recordings of African music in existence. Most of the items are either on acetate disc or magnetic tape, only a small proportion of which have as yet found their way onto more permanent pressed discs.

Several thousand items are likely to remain solely in the Reference Section of the Library as the technical quality of the recordings, often taken under adverse conditions and with inadequate and out-moded apparatus, does not warrant their reproduction on master discs but fully justifies their inclusion as Archive material for future study.

The transcription of African music, either in staff or syllabic notation, is still in its infancy and so only a handful of indigenous items are to be found in written or printed form.

COLLECTING AUTHENTIC RECORDINGS:

It is only within the last seven or eight years that apparatus for electrical sound recording on magnetic tape has been perfected, and the less expensive amateur equipment so commonly used to-day is still found wanting when the question of the reproduction and pressing of master discs is concerned. The high cost of apparatus has been a deterrent and adequate equipment for professional field recording for the purpose of making master discs cannot yet be obtained for under £1,000.

During the six years, prior to the establishment of the Library, the Director with the assistance of the Gallo recording company made a fairly extensive preliminary survey of central and east Africa and a few examples of the many recordings taken during that period have been pressed on 78 r.p.m. discs and circulated in their countries of origin. Unfortunately, the survey did not include the Union and only very few of the more southerly tribes were represented. Nevertheless, a selection of over 500 discs were made available (over 1,000 items) and, although many of them are already out of print, all the items are included in the Reference Library section.

It has been during this period, from 1948 to 1958, that Long Playing records have been developed and with this great technical advance the whole outlook and output of the Library has changed. In place of the short playing, two item disc, the ten or twelve item Long Playing disc has largely taken its place. The medium speed (45 r.p.m.) may yet be used by the Library for special issues of which copies are needed for general release at a lower unit cost.

It is with a certain satisfaction, therefore, that the Library can claim that it has not only established itself as a centre of empirical knowledge of African music through the large collection already housed in its Reference Library, but that it has kept up-to-date in technical matters and has already issued, or prepared for issue, a hundred Long Playing discs of good quality, recorded by its own field research unit.

The distances travelled by the field recording unit in order to obtain this number of recordings runs into several thousands of miles, and this is but a beginning of the work to be done if the Library is to prove an effective and continual source of authentic African recordings.

DISTRIBUTION OF RECORDINGS:

The name "AMA" (standing for "African Music/Musique Africaine") has been chosen for the Long Playing 'Sound of Africa' Series of 12" discs which the Library is now distributing to its Members. The first hundred discs include items recorded in over 40 African languages, from the following Territories

Belgian Congo, Ruanda/Urundi, Tanganyika, Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, Moçambique, Swaziland, Basutoland and the Union of South Africa.

They contain many items of outstanding musical merit.

If adequate financial resources are available, the Library expects to be able to add no less than seven or eight hundred songs and tunes to its published collection each year, and, with each year's work accomplished, the whole publication of the Long Playing series of records will become increasingly valuable as sociological evidence of Africa's most developed talent music and song.

Such an output of recordings will only be possible if the larger industries of Africa, such as the Mines, the Municipalities and other employers of African labour, educational establishments and others, make good use of the unique collection of material now being made available through the work of the Library. Without the Library, the sole organisation established for this specific purpose, the only African music that would find its way onto published discs, would be the current semi-European dance tunes and erotic lyrics, which are the exclusive product of the towns, and a handful of religious items. The whole gamut of indigenous music which is one of Africa's most important assets both as a means of recreation and as an integrator of indigenous society, would be largely ignored were it not for the attention now being paid to this aspect of their ecology by the Library.

With the completion of this first five year period, the Council and Directorate of the Library wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the many hours of unselfish work and thought generously given by the Members of its Committee which has been international in its composition, including representatives of Belgian, British, French, Portuguese and South African Territories.

I.L.A.M. RECORDING IN SWAZILAND

(May 24th to April 3rd)

Through the kindness and invitation of the Resident Commissioner of Swaziland, Mr. Brian Marwick, the Field Recording Unit of the International Library of African Music was enabled to make a very brief tour of the Territory and record a representative selection of Swati songs and music which have since been published in the "AMA" "Sound of Africa" series of Long Playing records, Nos. TR-68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73 and 75 (see pages 70 and 71). One of these items merited an Osborn Award (see page 74).

These items make an important and interesting addition to the present collection of the I.L.A.M. recordings.