

AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES IN GHANA

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Introduction

The lifespan of audiovisual material far exceeds that of their creators, curators and donors. Thus an inherent challenge that faces a nation or an institution establishing an audiovisual archives is how to preserve the collection that comes into its custody through field recordings, donations and purchases. This is a problem that audiovisual archives face the world over. Thus audiovisual archives are not established on short-term funds or on flimsy persuasions like enthusiasm but on continuous long-term funding or support. Once an audiovisual archives has been established, however, every effort should be made to ensure that it survives, whether funding is reduced later or even cut off completely. Such problems with cuts in funding are frequent in developing countries. Paradoxically, it is in such places that audiovisual archives are most needed since a large part of their culture and folklore is transmitted orally.

As audiovisual archivists, standing on the threshold of a new millennium, we need to look at new ways of ensuring our readiness to confront some of the problems which we encountered in the 20th century but were not prepared for. In the parlance of the day, we should be 'millennium compliant'. I will begin by briefly talking about some archives.

Information Services Department: The Cinema Section

The collection of the film archives of the cinema section of the Information Services Department (ISD) is broad in scope; it spans all

films that can be used for information, entertainment and educational purposes. The films are on celluloid.

The ISD originated with the cinema section. During World War II, there was a need to inform the public about those who had been conscripted from the nation to fight in the war; cinema vans were therefore procured to show films like *Empire at War*. Soon after the War it was realized that the means used to educate and inform the masses had actually achieved its purpose and therefore, could still maintain and use that system for informing the public.

Although celluloid is still the major format used, there has been a gradual change to video. This section has cinema vans, each fitted with playback equipment. The old vans have cinema projectors while the new ones are fitted with telejectors.

The collection is stored in a film library, an air-conditioned room fitted with metal shelves. The air conditioners are made to run continuously. At the moment, there are about 7,000 films spanning all aspects of human endeavour, with the reels stored in steel cans. Some of the films are, however, damaged. Recently, a storm ripped off the roof of the repository and it took more than six months before funds could be made available for repairs. While funds for the repair were delayed, tapes had already started to deteriorate. When the roof was finally repaired, extensive damage had already been caused to most of the tapes.

This archives is a receiving institution that does not produce films itself. It is fed by institutions like the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the Ghana Films Industry Corporation, the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana, to name just a few. The repository is managed by one supervisor and four staff members who are in charge of accessioning, cataloguing, repair and general maintenance of the holdings. The film unit is not autonomous and cannot raise money by itself without the approval of the ministry. It is also supposed to provide services free of charge. When there is a cholera outbreak, for example, educational campaigns are organized in the endemic areas for free in order to avoid the outbreak of serious epidemics in contagious areas.

Bokoer African Popular Music Archives Foundation (BAPMAF)

BAPMAF is a private archives which operates as a non-governmental organization. It is owned by John Collins, a sound engineer and lecturer. Towards the late 1980s and early 90s, a number of lovers of highlife music including John Collins realized that there were changes occurring in the music scene in Ghana. These were causing the youth to shift emphasis from live performance in the established highlife style to what has now come to be called 'Burger Highlife'. As a result of this shift, highlife music as it was known began to face a decline. It was believed that if nothing was done about the situation then the old highlife would be lost. Thus, in a bid to save the situation, BAPMAF was established.

The archival formats consist of shellacs and vinyl discs. There are also about 200 hours of Ghanaian and African popular music on audio cassettes. In addition to these, John has a recording studio which was very popular in the 80s. With the introduction of more modern recording equipment and studios, his setup has been almost kicked out of business. What John does these days is to go to the villages to record musicians who cannot afford to come and record in the big studios in the city.

Apart from music, the archives has photographs connected with Ghanaian popular music, some dating as far back as 1890.

Through this studio work a lot of master tapes evolved and they have added to the size of the collection. Again, some of the materials are gifts and some are purchases. The oldest recording in the archives happens to be the first commercially-released popular music in Ghana (Gold Coast) recorded in 1928.

A proper repository could not be kept due to financial constraints. The space is not air conditioned and the collections are all packed in boxes in the repository. The photographs are, however, on display. The repository is closed most of the time and only opened upon request. John runs the setup alone. He has tried soliciting funds a number of times without success.

The Film Video Library of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation

The Film Video Library of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation dates back to November 1989. Although the Corporation was set up in 1949, the video archives was burned to the ground due to a fire caused by an electrical fault in July 1989. Irreparable damage was done as playback and archival copies were stored in the same area. The majority of the collections are on magnetic tapes i.e. U-Matic, Beta and VHS. There are a few celluloid reels but there is no playback equipment. The library is fitted with air conditioners that are put off at the close of day. The collections are made up of locally produced programmes, purchases and donations to the Corporation.

After the archives was burnt, a new archives was not rebuilt due to financial constraints; the Radio Section temporarily gave them the use of the current repository after the fire outbreak. It is a small room used as an office, archives and viewing room. Thus, in some instances, materials are either mis-shelved or lost entirely.

Most of the funding available to the Corporation comes from the government, although radio and TV commercials, private coverage and sales of recorded works also generate some money for them.

The Sound Archive at the Institute of African Studies

The Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana has a music archives which was established almost 30 years ago. The nucleus of the archives' holdings was assembled by Professor J. H. Nketia in the 1950s when he began fieldwork on Ghanaian music. These were kept in his office and, in 1970, he invited Mary Seavoy, then a graduate student and assistant archivist with the Institute of Ethnomusicology at UCLA, to archive the tapes and records. Over the years, research expeditions by visiting scholars, fellows and students have greatly increased the archives' holdings. There is a good collection of music from various parts of Africa and Ghana in particular. Virtually every region of Ghana is represented in the archives' holdings.

The archives contains approximately 1,100 reel-to-reel audio tapes. Of these approximately 500 are original field recordings made by Prof. Nketia. Of the remaining 600 tapes, some are field tapes

made by other researchers and donated to the archives while the rest are copies of tapes containing music from other parts of Africa and around the world and intended for teaching purposes. The countries of origin include Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, Nigeria, Korea, Thailand, India, etc. In addition to the tapes, there are 500 78rpm discs of Ghanaian popular music, 500 long play discs from around the world including India, Pakistan, Japan, Indonesia, Haiti, Cuba and, of course, Hugh Tracey's *The Sounds of Africa Series* which are intended for teaching.

The archives houses about 200 reprints of articles on ethnomusicology, there are papers from music conferences, long essays on musicology, music education, etc.

There were several months between 1985 and 1987 during which there was no air conditioner in the archives. This led to the deterioration of some of the magnetic tapes.

A grant from the German government, through its cultural aid fund, enabled the Ethnomusicology Archive of Mainz University to assist the Institute of African Studies in the restoration of the archives. The German Embassy in Accra presented DAT decks and other equipment for duplication to the sound archives. Accordingly, the reel-to-reel tapes were recorded onto DAT as well as ordinary cassettes. Although DAT has been found to be highly perishable and not a good medium for archival storage, at the time of the agreement it was a new technology and looked very promising in terms of archival storage. To ensure that there were backup copies of the materials, a set of the tapes were deposited in the Ethnomusicology Archive, Mainz University, which had then just been established. The archives is managed by an ethnomusicologist and a technician. For about a decade now, no new materials have been acquired or deposited in the archives.

International Centre for African Music and Dance

The need to establish an International Centre for African Music and Dance (ICAMD) was endorsed at an international meeting of scholars representing Africa, the USA, Latin America, Europe and Asia who met at the Rockefeller Conference Centre in Bellagio in

October 1992. With the assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation and SIDA, the ICAMD was established as a unit within the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, in 1993. Its audiovisual archives was set up in 1995, in line with its objective of being an archival, documentation and study centre for African music and dance.

Like the sound archives at the Institute of African Studies, initial materials to start the audiovisual archives comprising reel-to-reel tapes of field recordings, audio and video cassettes, were donated by the Director of the Centre, Prof. Nketia. This was expanded by donations from other scholars, particularly those who do fieldwork or visit the Centre from time to time and also deposit copies of their work with the Centre.

The Centre is equipped with audio, video and still cameras for use by the Centre's staff when they go on field trips from time to time, to different parts of Ghana.

The Centre presently has about 600 video cassettes (in S-VHS, VHS, Video8, Hi-8 and Mini DV formats) and 2,000 audio recordings (in reel-to-reel, audio cassette, DAT and CD formats).

The Centre shares the same compound as the Institute of African Studies. Thus, apart from the Centre's collection, the holdings of the sound archives of the Institute of African Studies have also been made available by donating copies of their catalogue to the Centre.

Holdings consist of field research materials and commercially acquired materials. We have given the prefix C to the commercially acquired materials and the prefix R to the research materials. Thus, for the inaugural conference which saw the Centre being integrated into the University of Ghana, we gave the prefix R1 and the first cassette in this collection was numbered R1/1 and so on. As a rule, when a particular cassette is consulted more than three times, a playback copy is made so as to reduce the damage done to the original. For each recording, an index is provided.

In 1996, there was an initial attempt to computerize the holdings with FileMaker Pro 2.0. After data had been fed into the computer for some time it was realized that retrieval by keywords was not proving

effective. This rendered that software unusable. With the introduction of FileMaker 4.0, however, that problem has been taken care of.

In cataloguing with FileMaker, each material that came into our repository was considered a record. Below are the fields that we created for each record.

Name of Performers:

Name of Composers:

Country of Origin:

Culture:

Language:

Style/Genre:

Instrumentation:

Title of Songs:

Accession No.:

Other Copy No.:

Format:

Status:

Source of Acquisition:

Date of Acquisition:

Date of Recording:

Place of Recording:

Name of Recordist:

Occasion:

Equipment Used:

Documentation:

Notes Prepared by:

One of the main problems the archives is facing is that of space. As the Centre does not have its own building, it is housed in the School of Performing Arts. Four rooms were released to it by the School of Performing Arts for the director's office, the administrative office, a library and audiovisual archives. The archives is therefore used as the repository and the workstation as well as the listening/viewing room. The Centre has got a building plan and construction work will begin very soon on the proposed building complex where the archives will have separate rooms for its various activities.

Due to this space problem, a newsletter containing recent acquisitions has been shelved because responses to this would bring in a flood of requests which the archives could not handle at the moment.

At the moment the clients are students of the School of Performing Arts, researchers, lecturers, cultural officers from the Ministry of Education and radio presenters. Due to the problem of space, the archives does not offer assistance to musicians, dancers and music lovers in addition to its current schedule.

On a small scale, the archives records sound effects during fieldtrips. This is in response to requests frequently made by drama students for recordings of forest sounds, cries of owls and other animal calls.

When the archives started about four years ago, the staff went to the field with a VHS camcorder and audio cassette recorders. After some time this was changed to Video8 and DAT and even later, Video8 was changed to Hi-8. Recently, we have started using a digital video camera and consideration is being given to a MiniDisc recorder replacing the DAT. Audiovisual media proves to be very unstable and expensive with regard to both keeping up with new technology and holding on to old technology.

Apart from equipment, establishment and maintenance, a costly and precious part of audiovisual archiving is collection. Going to the field to record is expensive for, apart from the equipment and supplies, provision must be made for transport, accommodation, meals, honoraria and other expenses. Once materials have been collected, however, there is the need for a minimum number of staff to manage an archives. What defines a minimum staff is very subjective and depends largely on the local situation. Institutions with a bigger reader population (clients), for example, would obviously have a bigger staff than a smaller institution whose collection is hardly consulted. An archivist and an assistant handle the archives in question. During fieldtrips, however, some of the staff of the Centre act as resource persons and field assistants.

We hope that soon an inventory of the holdings of all audiovisual archival institutions in Ghana will be available at the Centre so that we can identify the gaps and plan how to fill them. This would also aid in

assembling materials to produce a National Audiovisual Catalogue.

Alternative Methods of Funding Audiovisual Research Archives

Audiovisual archives in academic or research institutions may be considered to fall within the not-for-profit sector. Thus, apart from funds coming in from the institutions that set them up, there is sometimes virtually nothing to fall back on during shortfalls in available funding. It is imperative, therefore, that one should consider alternative ways of raising funds so that intermittent shortfalls do not have significant effects on everyday work.

Funding could generally be classified under two main heads, direct and indirect. Direct funding has to do with grants/aid which normally come from various institutions and governments. Indirect funding comes in many ways, such as through cooperation with local and international institutions, networking and capacity building. Normally one needs to write a proposal embodying a strong defence of why the project needs to be supported. Often such funds are not obtained when applied for or may come late due to the long queue of proposals ahead of one's own. This is quite normal and should not deter anyone from trying again. One should seek advice on how to write better proposals, the best timing for it and identify other sources of support. Potential donors who cannot help may, on the other hand, be prepared to suggest other prospects and may even offer to use their influence to help. Funding agencies sometimes prefer projects which have a limited duration; it is only a few funding agencies who are willing to cater for general ongoing programmes. Most of them prefer to see the results and gratitude quickly, preferably within the same budget year.

It must be noted that prospective donors, whether of money, equipment, facilities or services, all hope to gain some benefit meaningful to them. Altruism is a nice idea in the abstract but in reality, donors want to realize some clear benefit for their help. An important part of the job is to find out what they want and build it into the project proposal.

Cooperation with local and international institutions has to do with establishing relations through which equipment and the training

of staff are provided in exchange for copies of recorded materials, for example. Such efforts could also include an exchange of documentary materials between the two institutions via the Internet in a way that allows students from both sides to make use of audio and video resources without necessarily being at the site themselves.

Capacity building has to do with the provision of training programmes for staff as opposed to providing funds for such training programmes. The advantage with this type of training is that the sponsoring agency monitors and makes sure that the desired results are gained. On the other hand, however, this training might be incompatible with local circumstances and hence irrelevant.

Finally, there is networking. Recently, the ICAMD entered into such an agreement, the Culture Africa Network (CAN). This project is based in the Contemporary African Music Archive (CAMA), University of Cape Town, South Africa. ICAMD is one of the six centres in Africa. The project is an attempt to put cultures of each country on a computer database which will be made accessible to each centre through an intranet connectivity and subsequently on the Internet, where everyone could browse free or register as a user. To make this network possible, each centre has been provided with the necessary equipment and materials. In a project like this, in one bid to embark on more fieldtrips to fill in the gaps in collections available, the holdings of the archives would automatically increase. Also, funds which could have been used to procure equipment could now be used to do something else, probably preservation. (For another description of CAN, see Ali al-Daw's paper in this volume.)

As was mentioned earlier, the Institute of African Studies archives entered into such a cooperation with the Ethnomusicology Archive, Mainz University, Germany. Mainz University provided playback equipment and digital audio tapes (DAT) in exchange for duplicate copies of the collections at the African Studies Sound Archives. Care should be taken in such exchanges so that all the appropriate copyright laws are factored into each agreement and proposal.

There are some other ways of raising funds. These have not been experimented with, at least not in my institution, but we hope to do

so. Charging a reasonable fee for services and publication is also a way of raising funds for audiovisual archives. How much to charge is an important decision. It should not be so much that it deters prospective users from benefiting from the materials and at the same time it should be enough to ensure that funds be raised for the archives. In most institutions, money is mostly paid per operator hour on orders and requests made. Commercial orders obviously incur a higher charge than non-commercial/research orders. The initial motive should not be to make a profit but rather to raise requisite funds.

Publishing and sales of recorded materials in archives seems to me a sure source of generating money. Sometimes there are hurdles to be cleared, e. g. having to do with recordings which were made with the initial aim of being used for educational purposes. This should not be a stumbling block in any way; discussions should show the best way out. These days there is lot of a demand for lesser-known cultures from countries sometimes referred to as 'developing'.

In our bid to capture the past for the future, we should also think of how this can be done permanently. One area is not to compete with the recording studios but to consider ways of recording those who cannot afford to be recorded in the big studios. This would take the form of fieldtrips. Before such recordings are made, the archives should enter into agreements with the individual or group so that when the music manages to sell, moneys will be released to the performer/s. This is not new to many archives. In my view, however, I think this should be done with the aim of raising money for the performers and most especially, the archives.

These days, with computers and the Internet, the interested world can be informed. Excerpts of these recordings could be put on the Net with information on how copies could be obtained. I hesitate to state categorically that audiovisual archives can be self-supporting but that is what I see as ideal in my work as an archivist.

When funds are running low and there is no hope of getting some immediately, measures should be taken to direct all available energy into preservation—the primary responsibility of an archivist—so that what has been collected over the years will not be lost. Anything not

directly connected with preservation should be halted until funds begin to come in.

Changes in government and institutional policies and technology that keeps evolving in an unprecedented manner, have really affected audiovisual archives. But a more serious situation is one's inability to change with the times. At this juncture, we should be thinking of ways of generating money. In this endeavour, however, the keyword should be caution, keeping in mind the objectives of the institution so that its aims and objectives are not compromised or sacrificed on the altar of raising funds. Such moneys should be used to set up an endowment fund for the general work of the archives.