

Not Just Classical

By Greg Fitzgerald, Head,
Maybe Music and Dance Library

The jungles and deserts of Africa and Asia...Native American tribal lands...the ancient monasteries of Tibet...and fields of the Old South where slaves sang of freedom: these are just some of the places where the audio resources of the Harper C. Maybe Music and Dance Library can transport you. The collection primarily reflects the emphases of the curricula in the School of Music at WMU—western art music, i.e., “classical”; jazz; and music theatre. In addition, it also supports courses in world music and seeks to round out patrons’ experiences by making available the sounds of instruments and voices from around the globe.

Beginning in our own country, recordings produced by Smithsonian Folkways, the record label of the Smithsonian Institution, illuminate the traditions of peoples who came here from Africa and the British Isles, and how they contributed to the evolution of American folk and religious music. This music, in turn, documented and influenced the nation’s history through wars, the Great Depression, labor struggles, and the civil rights movement. Folkways’ reissues of recordings it made in the 1950s and 1960s, complete with song texts and program notes from the originals, are particularly valuable for such study.

The lives and struggles of African-Americans, as expressed in music, are vividly documented in the Library of Congress’ *Archive of Folk Culture*, on the Rounder label, with examples of African-American songs and spirituals. *The Long Road to Freedom*, a six-CD set on the Buddha label, provides what it calls “a musical history of America’s Africans” beginning with roots music from Ghana, Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa, through examples of shouts and spirituals, Louisiana Creole and slave songs, songs of the Underground Railroad and Civil War, children’s songs, minstrel music, and others, sacred and secular. Totally in the sacred realm is the Smithsonian series *Wade in the Water* that explores African-American spirituals, gospel, and congregational singing.

Another taste of America is provided by *The Best of Broadside 1962-1988*, which samples “anthems of the American underground” from the popular magazine dedicated to topical songs from an era of turbulent social change. Songs about war and peace, the nuclear arms race, civil rights, women’s rights, and labor struggles form the core of

the collection, which features a lavishly illustrated guide with song texts and historical background.

While Native American music is not strongly represented in the collection, there are several Smithsonian compilations of music from various tribes, and a disc on the Rykodisc label features songs of the Ojibwa, Menominee, and Winnebago peoples of the Great Lakes region. (The library has additional Native American music on LP records, which are gradually being replaced with compact discs.)

Beyond our shores, the Rounder, Ocora, and Rykodisc labels each contributes a series of world music recordings. A sampling of the titles takes us to the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Africa, Indonesia, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Some discs represent a geographical overview, while others explore a particular genre or people in more depth—Indonesian gamelan, the Zulus of South Africa, the Maori of New Zealand. There are some examples, too, from the Americas and the Caribbean. Most of these recordings were made “in the field” and represent a wide range of musical expression usually centering on community life and traditions and often accompanying dancing.

Indeed, the dance is integral to an understanding of world cultures and their music, and this is where the library’s visual resources come in. Primary video offerings in the area of world music are the *JVC Anthology of World Music and Dance* and its cousins, co-produced by Smithsonian and Folkways. The original set consists of thirty videocassettes covering Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Polynesia, while others, of several cassettes each, augment the coverage of Africa and add Western Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean to the mix. Single videos throughout the collection feature specific types of music and dance, often as part of a theater experience. These visual resources are valuable for

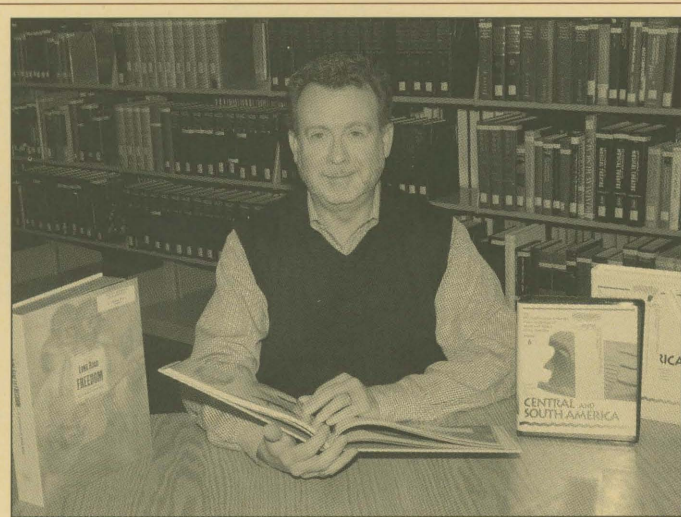
showing the rituals and dances associated with the music and for demonstrating how musical instruments look and are played.

Also from around the world comes perhaps the most unusual audio resource in the library—the *BBC Sound Effects Library*. Containing relatively little music in the traditional sense, this set of 40 compact discs can be useful to composers and theater sound designers. It includes hundreds of sounds—all kinds of animals, insects and birds, machines and transport, people at work and play, weather conditions—from all over the world. Want to know what an Iberian marsh frog sounds like? Need to hear border collies, playing and fighting in the early morning? Or a Land Rover’s window opening and shutting? How about an open market in Algeria? They are all in the BBC collection! A handy index describes each sound in detail.

While the library maintains a policy of limiting loans of its audio and video recordings to faculty, emeriti, and staff, other patrons are invited to use these resources anytime within the library, where, because of the policy, they are more likely to be available when requested. (One exception is the *BBC Sound Effects Library*, which students may borrow.)

Increasing both the accessibility and size of the library’s audio resources are the newest “additions” to the collection: online listening services. Two such databases are being offered through 2005, after which they will be re-evaluated. *Classical Music Library* provides music from over thirty classical labels, the major ones being Arabesque, EMI, Hyperion, and Newport Classic. Users of the service may browse or search for specific works by composer, title, genre, and several other access points, and create playlists for repeated use. *Naxos Music Library* offers listeners the entire catalogue of the Naxos label, including jazz, folk, world, and new age music as well as a large classical repertoire. WMU patrons may listen anytime, anywhere, accessing the services using links on the Music and Dance Library home page (www.wmich.edu/library/music/), or by a title search in WestCat.

Whether on a computer anywhere or just within its walls, the Music and Dance Library’s audio resources are certainly “more than classical,” jazz, and musicals. They reach in every direction to bring the sights and sounds of musicians and dancers around the world to our students and other library patrons, in recognition that the musical community is indeed a global one.



Greg Fitzgerald: Master of Music