Not Just Classical

By Greg Fitzgerald, Head, Maybee 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. Maybee 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 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 "additions" to the collection: online listening services. Two such databases are being offered through 2003, 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 homepage (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 musical. 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.