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SOME TASKS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUND ARCHIVES

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After being formed by a general Assembly at Amsterdam in 1969 - a session devoted exclusively to the necessary refinement of constitutional phrase and the structuring of procedure - the International Association of Sound Archives only began to define its tasks during the first working sessions of its Council at Leipzig the following year. To no one's surprise more problems were encountered than were defined. The greatest and most obvious of these, however, requires little in the way of definition because of its sheer magnitude. Like Everest, it looms high for all to see.

Those of us who are responsible for large collections of historical documents-in-sound need not only know what such documents are in our custody, but where other materials might exist. It is only with such extra-institutional knowledge that we can acquit ourselves of our responsibilities to the scholars who come to us for guidance in their specialized research, the broadcasters and publishers who seek to enlighten large segments of people, and the teachers who have discovered that the student's ears are as open an avenue to his mind as are his eyes.

The Everest that loomed before us at Leipzig was, of course, an international census of sound archives. Before attempting the ascent, however, we must try out the terrain, and this we are doing with a preliminary questionnaire which will give us all opportunity to become better acquainted with one another. We must learn about the greatest strengths and interests in one another's collections. We must also learn about one another's procedures, for they can vary widely from one institution to another, and it would be foolish to refer an inquirer to one archivist with a problem more conveniently answered by another. If this attempt on a mountainous task seems imprudent, I can only say that it would be even more so were it not for the fact that we can count on the cooperation of the Record Library Commission of the International Association of Music Libraries. At this stage of our development the greatest number of sound archives known to us are musically oriented. This appearance may well altered, however, after we, in our respective countries, and through our various international contacts, locate sound collections whose emphases are other than musical.

They will include collections of oral history and spoken literary and dramatic documentation, scientific archives of biological and medical sounds, and recorded linguistic surveys, to name only a few of the aural phenomena whose preservation might be of value to the generations that come after us. It will be the special responsibility

of the IASA to seek out these -not to the exclusion of music, to be sure, but as a primary aim.

From the census will emerge two fundamental types of recording: that which exists in published form (commercial gramophone records, if you will), and that which does not (instantaneous recordings on wax cylinders, acetates discs, tapes, etc.). I suspect that we may one day learn that we have more unica in the former category than we now realize, but it will doubtless be in the second category - the audio equivalent of manuscripts - where the most astonishing riches will be revealed.

Happily, not all of the tasks encountered at Leipzig will be so formidable.

The lack of national discographies in some countries and their relative incompleteness in others offer day-to-day inconveniences in the location of published recordings. Detailed lists of such publications and those recordings they do and do not embrace are being prepared for the next meeting of the Council and should provide a clearer definition of the problem and suggest steps toward solving it. Needless to say, results will be published in these pages.

Several sound archivists expressed concern over large numbers of surplus duplicates in their collections of gramophone records, for which they had insufficient space, but which they were loath to destroy for fear that a colleague might have use for them. The response to the proposal that duplicate lists be exchanged has not thus far been overwhelming, but it has been sufficient to justify further dissemination of the lists, which will be done following the next meeting of the Council.

The cataloging of audio documents presents certain very serious problems, but problems which can be surmounted with a little concentrated effort. It was brought to the attention of the Council, for example, that subject entries for spoken word recordings are not nearly as sophisticated as subject retrieval needs require. The problem will be dealt with in the very future by specialists who have wrestled with it for many years and, hopefully, the solutions codified for the benefit of us all.

The Council will meet again at St. Gallen, Switzerland, August 22-28, thanks to the generous cooperation of our friends in the International Association of Music Libraries, whose Ninth Congress will take place concurrently. If the IASA gets on its feet and solves even a few of the problems outlined above we will owe much to our colleagues in the music library profession for having helped to make it possible. Once we are able to stand upright, unattended, we will show our thanks by asking them to join us in the final assault on Everest.