

Article

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Rolf Schuursma

In July 1979, on the occasion of my Presidential Address at the opening of the IASA Conference in Salzburg, it was my pleasure to congratulate the Phonogrammarchiv on its eightieth year. Nonetheless, I felt it my duty to remind the audience of a certain great piece of world literature in which a much older and somewhat different sound archive was demonstrated. That archive operated at very low cost, with virtually no managerial problems, with simple analogue technology and a surprising kind of public accessibility. I am, of course, referring to the horn of the coachman of Baron von Münchhausen - the horn which outside, in the bitter cold, got frozen and thus saved an archive full of beautiful melodies. Once warmed up in the cosy atmosphere of a local inn, it began to play those melodies entirely by itself, without any human interference. Unfortunately no Akademie der Wissenschaften was there to channel the experience into the grooves of research and development, which in the case of the Phonogrammarchiv brought so much profit to the world of sound archiving. Therefore, my little historical excursion, however well documented, has not appeared in archival textbooks and certainly will not keep us from celebrating the Phonogrammarchiv centenary today.

Allow me to continue this speech with a few words in German.

Ich möchte nämlich die Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, das Kuratorium des Phonogrammarchivs und besonders Herrn Dr. Dietrich Schüller zu hundert Jahren Phonogrammarchiv herzlich gratulieren. Bald werden wir zurückschauen vom Standpunkt des nächsten Jahrhunderts und 1899 erfahren als ein Moment in der Altertumsgeschichte. Das Phonogrammarchiv ist aber wie immer sehr lebendig und lebhaft. Es freut mich daher meinem Freund Dietrich Schüller, dem Direktor des Phonogrammarchivs, sagen zu können wie sehr ich und vielen mit mir Seine Arbeit bewundert haben und auch jetzt bewundern. Es freut mich sehr auch Frau Barbara Schüller zu begrüssen, Ich hoffe dass Dr. Schüller, Seine Mitarbeiter und die Mitarbeiter der anderen wunderbaren Archiven in Österreich noch lange so wirken können, zu Gunsten der weltweiten Kreis der Schallarchiven.

To summarise these words in English, it is my pleasure to congratulate the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Kuratorium of the Phonogrammarchiv, and, in particular, my friend Dr. Dietrich Schüller, on the centenary celebration of the Phonogrammarchiv. We all admire Dietrich Schüller's professional work and it is our hope that he, his staff and the personnel from the other well-respected Austrian archives will continue their efforts, to the benefit of sound archives throughout the world.

There is yet another reason for this festive occasion. In 1969, in Amsterdam, the International Association of Sound Archives, IASA, was founded. Today we celebrate its thirtieth anniversary. In the same Presidential Address at the opening of the Salzburg Conference, which I mentioned before, I could not help wondering why it took so long before sound archives successfully accomplished the establishment of such an organisation of international status. I asked myself this all the more, since the distance in time between the inventions of Thomas Alva Edison and Charles Cros and the foundation of the first sound

archive was only twenty-two years. However, we will not go into that question just now. Suffice it to say that after the enthusiastic but somewhat uncertain beginning, the Association - and I quote a few terms from the Presidential Address of David Lance in September 1981 - became 'adolescent' and subsequently reached 'adulthood', and even 'maturity'.

Because, of course, like every organisation of this kind, beginning from scratch, IASA has gone through different stages, each with its own qualities and problems. In his 'Personal Review of Thirty Years of IASA' in the recent *Information Bulletin*, Ulf Scharlau referred to the diplomatic, rather than professional challenges that IASA had to cope with in its initial stage. How true it was. The relationship with the International Association of Music Libraries, IAML, the organisation that had stood at the cradle of IASA, was not always easy. Yet, I also remember gratefully the support we received from IAML when IASA still had only a few members, people who were often also members of IAML, and little financial means.

But apart from these considerations, I would call the first stage of our Association the period of 'getting acquainted'. The newly recruited members of IASA got to know each other as well as each other's archives. In the meantime the membership was becoming world-wide. In those days music was still the 'raison d'etre' of most member archives, very much stimulated by the close co-operation with IAML. However, at the end of that period, in 1975 in Montreal, a session about oral history testified to the growing importance of that and other non-music fields.

The second stage, which we could title 'how did we do it', was the period in which we studied each other's solutions to collecting, storing, cataloguing, access, copyright, technical matters - the period in which we also began to professionalize the management of the Association and to set up committees dedicated to several of these subjects. In the technical committee Dietrich Schüller started what became an impressive range of research and recommendations.

Finally in the third stage, which we could title 'widening the scope', IASA received international recognition, in the first place from UNESCO. The Association began to play a role in the international information field: a status which IASA still enjoys. It is the fruit of continuity but also rejuvenation, thanks no doubt to the mix of experienced members and younger, developing talent. The recent refreshing design of IASA's house style is a token of that rejuvenating attitude. Personally I am very pleased that IASA's logo, designed during the first days of the Association in my Institute in Utrecht, has been kept.

Throughout the different periods of IASA's history many members contributed to the well being of the Association and its expansion. There were those who for many years were instrumental in raising the quality level of sound archiving and now belong to the gallery of honoured deceased. To name only a few: IASA's first two Presidents, Don Leavitt and Timothy Eckersley. And then several other distinguished members of the Association such as Herbert Rosenberg, Ivàn Pethes, Philip Miller, Claudie Marcel-Dubois and very recently Patrick Saul and Dietrich Lotichius. One remembers them with great respect and is grateful for their friendship. In the meantime the Association moves on.

Moves on, indeed. One of IASA's decisive steps towards the future has been the change of its name in order to incorporate audiovisual archives. 'What's in a name?' and how little it takes to add a few words to the title. However, it took the Association, if I may say so, quite some time and deliberation before it changed course. In the IASA Journal President Sven Allerstrand recently mentioned 'lengthy discussions of a decade or more'. I can help him there. As early as 1970, during its second annual meeting in Leipzig, some IAML and IASA

members felt that the new Association could only survive if it incorporated audiovisual media. I also remember vividly the much later discussion between Ulf Scharlau and Dietrich Schüller in Helsinki, in 1993, each defending their own opinion as to the future of the Association. I read again with interest the remarks made from the floor at that same session, amongst them Rainer Hubert's argumentation for expanding into the AV field. These contributions were published in the IASA Journal, together with the urgent plea by Ray Edmondson for a widening of IASA's scope, as well as several opposite opinions. If I understand it well, it was not a group of audiovisual archives that knocked on IASA's door and forced the Association into the new direction. Rather it was technological development that pointed towards a more general audiovisual direction. Or should I say: the general digital direction in which all information seems to be heading these days.

Indeed, might it not be that the widening of IASA's scope has only been another step towards the new digital age. Will that be an age, in which the virtual reality of information will increasingly take the upper hand at the cost of the traditional realities of the physical world? The founder of Amazon.Com, Jeff Bezos, was quoted in *The New Yorker* of May 14, 1999 as follows:

"The fact of the matter is, the physical world is the best medium ever. It's an amazing medium. You can do more in the physical world than you can do anywhere else. I love the physical world!"

I am sure we all agree with him, if only now because we are enjoying the pleasure of being in Vienna. But the virtual world of digitization is just as exciting and promising, as Mr. Bezos would probably agree. It is only when virtual realities come to erode some of our most valuable cultural heritage that we tend to think twice. Take the case of research and university libraries - a field with which in the later part of my professional life I became well acquainted and which I can refer to now in order to point out one or two considerations on the threshold of the digital age.

According to many information technologists the role of research libraries will soon be shifting definitely from the traditional ways of collection building and distribution of book materials to one of supplying the right kind of digitized information for the right user at the right time. Libraries will no longer measure their value in terms of the amount of volumes on their shelves, in other words their millions of books and bound periodicals. Far more important will be the accessibility of information available throughout the world and the ability of the libraries to select from the unending amount of data just that information which will suit the user. Of course this can only be accomplished if libraries take part in networks, connected throughout the world by the Internet. A few weeks ago, when my wife Ann and I visited the Reference Department of the Library of the University of California at Los Angeles, we were able to view practically the whole library system of the Netherlands displayed on the computer screen. Searching whatever title in my former University Library in Rotterdam via the net connection was just as easy as if we were doing the same exercise at home. And that is how it should be.

But there is more. Natural scientists, in particular, who mainly work with factual data, have a strong need for continuous contact with databases, and, via e-mail, with colleagues throughout the world. They are very well served by new digital developments. But other researchers, particularly in the humanities, have a need for more elaborate, contemplative, reflective texts which one does not easily take from the rather restricted computer screen. Next to using the net, they want media more effective from their point of view - namely book materials. Therefore university and research libraries, which exist to cover the full range of human knowledge, do well to invest in both digital networking and the collecting

and distributing of book materials. Unfortunately, in most library situations, financial restrictions make it impossible to give both sides the commitment they deserve. In many cases collection building suffers. In this respect, and despite its enormous advantages, the strong accent on the primary role of digitization of all information can cause an erosion of our cultural heritage, particularly in the humanities.

I wonder if this problem rings a bell in the archival environment? Of course, there are important differences compared with the library field. Archives are by definition the place where one expects to find unique documents that cannot be found anywhere else. Therefore it is even more necessary to do everything to save these documents in such a way that their original qualities are preserved. Digitization seems to provide an important instrument towards that end. Reading the 1997 recommendations of IASA's Technical Committee under the title *The Safeguarding of the Audio Heritage* - by the way this is a text that I plucked from the net - it seems that sound archives are taking good care of their future. Indeed, on our recent tour around the UCLA campus in Los Angeles, Ann and I saw a digitization operation underway in full force in her former workplace, the Ethnomusicology Archive. Thus, in this respect, sound and audiovisual collections seem to have a good connection with what is going to happen in the digital information age.

But this is still not the end of the story. What will the future bring? In the next century will not more and more information of all kinds stream out of the walls of libraries and archives into our private living rooms? At the same time will not analogous amounts of money be automatically transferred from the user's bank account to the information brokers who keep the flood of data going? As long as archives succeed in safeguarding their portion of such financial deals, no harm will be done. At least it does not seem so. On the contrary, archives may well play a bigger role in the information industry than we can imagine now. The more people become interested in historical items from the previous century, the more archives will be asked to deliver them. Yet, it also seems to me that the urge to digitize all possible information, making it thus available on standard format to all kinds of agencies, is not without risks. I was confirmed in this respect by what I read in the recent issues of the IASA journal. I refer to the lack of respect for archival materials that require time for detailed consideration instead of just 'zapping'. And - as Grace Koch has pointed out - the lack of respect this may represent for authentic spiritual and intellectual property.

Are such considerations a reason to stop digitizing, either in the library field or in the sphere of sound and audiovisual archives? Of course not, if only because major trends in human history cannot be reversed. And believe me, digitization and all it implies, forms a major trend in human history. Besides, digital or not, there will always be music lovers who like to hear a complete recording, even repeatedly. There will always be researchers who, carefully and with respect for the past, like to understand what an oral history or linguistic recording has to offer them. And as regards libraries, there will always be people interested in the Adventures of Baron von Münchhausen, people who besides getting a lot of information from the net, will like to read the adventures themselves in book form.

At the end of this speech I would like to look at my musical score, change the key once more to major and see what notes are left. They include a few words from the Presidential Address of David Lance in September 1981 in Budapest:

"IASA is a special Association full of a lot of very special people. The great bond of our Association is that these special people come together first and foremost as friends. As a result there exists in IASA a closeness and a warmth that is quite unusual and quite outstanding among professional organizations of my experience."

I hope David Lance won't mind my quoting him. I thank you for listening and I look forward to a very special IASA experience during this Conference week.