

I know you have all been sitting on the edges of your seats wondering where your IASA journal issue number 36 is. I apologise for its late arrival on your desks. As you know most of the articles published in the journal are drawn from our annual conferences, which are normally held in September of each year. This gives a reasonable turnaround time to get papers in, review and edit them, and get them to the designers for layout and printing so that journals hit your in-trays in December or January. Our annual conference this year was held in November rather than September, so we (authors, designers, printers, post room staff) have been chasing our tails to prepare the issue in good time. I'd like to thank authors for their speedy reactions to my requests for papers.

The experience of this rather rushed production timeline has demonstrated how good it would be for the editor to have a few papers in store for publication. I would invite all IASA members to consider offering papers at any time to the editor for consideration. These don't have to be papers presented at IASA conferences: perhaps you've delivered at another relevant conference, or you've been working on something that you think would be of interest to IASA members. Deadlines for each issue are 31 March for the summer issue and 15 October for the winter issue. Offers of papers are always welcome.

In this issue we benefit from the experiences of colleagues at Cube-Tec (one of IASA's sustaining members), the Austrian Mediathek, the Centre de Recherche en Ethnomusicologie (Research Centre for Ethnomusicology, CREM-LESC-CNRS) and from The British Library. These presentations demonstrate our two fundamental concerns: the process of digitisation/preservation, and the mechanisms for unlocking our collections/access (dissemination). They talk of lessons learned for improving audio and video digitisation accuracy, efficiency and workflows, on the one hand, and, on the other, of means of harnessing the potential for added value from our users via web technologies.

The IASA/AMIA conference in Philadelphia in November was all about convergence. The included paper from our colleagues at the HathiTrust (University of Michigan, USA) provides an interesting take on a repository's attempt to integrate audio into an archive system already established for text and image files. The paper therefore points to some of the similarities and differences of the various media. I read the paper, additionally, as providing good instruction for those smaller archives around the world which are embarking on digitisation programmes of their own. The authors include resources they found useful in their decision making.

Finally, I had the privilege of being at Tony Seeger's keynote address at the Philadelphia conference. Tony's inclusive approach to audiovisual archiving is underpinned by his own anthropological research in Brazil that allows us to ponder the challenges we audiovisual archivists face as we attempt to "converge": the diversity of human societies and languages, the increasing desire of these societies to document their own lives and experiences, the fact that audiovisual documentation can never archive the full experience (what of aromas, sensations and emotions?), the diversity of methods and approaches to archiving (lack of interoperability and shared standards), the fact that although progress in addressing many of the challenges is being made, "many of these things are constantly changing; by the time we have figured out how to manage them, they will have changed again".

Members will know that Tony received the 2010 IASA Award of Recognition for his long-term "advocacy for the cause of audiovisual archives, communities and music". What we should have included in his commendation was special mention of his unfailing ability to balance thorough analysis of the issues with pure entertainment. His presentation was interspersed with self-penned verses sung with gusto by himself and the entire assembly to the tunes of "Sweet Violets" and "This Land is Your Land". He has written up his presentation for publication here including these verses. Something to hum along to as we read.

Yours truly,
Janet Topp Fargion
Editor IASA

The old year has passed, and as we start the New Year it is always worth while to review what we have done, and amongst the many things that the IASA membership has achieved for our organisation in 2010 is the IASA AMIA joint conference. We themed our meeting Together for a Sound Vision, but we were pleased to find, from the very first workshop and meeting in Philadelphia, that vision expanded by the synergies that come from a joint meeting. The length of expertise that this meeting of our two organisations brought together, the depth of knowledge and the breadth of our combined interests made it an event in which many shared in some extraordinary meetings of vision. The keynote, delivered by Professor Anthony Seeger, also recipient of the 2010 IASA award, masterfully brought together the discussion of convergence with the complexity of its implementation, and any keynote whose key messages could be summarised and delivered as song is one which will be long remembered (you just had to be there)!

The range of successful papers and impressive workshops seen in Philadelphia continue to cross fertilize ideas within our two organisations. We joined in meetings that addressed issues of common concern and looked at shared practices and shared issues. And in doing this we met old friends and made new ones. Congratulations and a big thank you to all who made this conference a success; one that will continue to bear fruit for years to come.

The world economic environment has been going through something of a shake-up over the past year or two, yet the impact of the global financial crisis has been slow in coming to our part of the world community: The business of sound and audiovisual collecting and archiving has not, until quite recently, really felt its icy grip. Now however, as the banks look for support from governments, and in turn governments and industry alike look for ways to reduce spending, there are announcements and reports that many of the major collecting and archiving institutions are being forced to cut back on the work they do and the services they provide. As part of the responsible sound and audiovisual archiving community we need to ask: Who makes the decisions about how to reduce funding in an archive? How are the effects of budget cuts weighed against the benefit of our AV collections?

Loss of funding is one of the biggest risks to a collection of sound and audiovisual items, and especially to digital collections. The failure to fund vital infrastructure at critical periods can lead to irretrievable loss. We are, by the nature of the material we preserve, dependant on the technology to get access to our machine readable collections. So when the time comes to weigh up the consequences of budget cuts, to decide between a reduction in services or a reduction in standards, between collecting less and managing with less staff, those decisions should be informed by best collection management based principles rather than just the bottom line of monetary savings.

The day to day business of IASA members has long involved the risk mitigation and management strategies that ensure our collections are maintained and available. We have developed policies to do with all sorts of other risks; fire, flood, carrier degradation and equipment obsolescence. Similarly, the ability to manage with periodic reduction in income should be one of the key identifiable risk mitigation factors in our management plans. This is a challenge for IASA; to provide relevant and useful advice and advocacy in circumstances where any and all possible outcomes may not be desirable, but where navigating the potential scenarios to find the best result needs to come from well informed, expert knowledge, supported by a knowledgeable international community of wide and varied experience, not just those with control of the purse strings. If we believe that these economic events are to some extent cyclical, and the evidence of history supports that, we need to make the decisions that ensure that the collections we manage are available for the future to use.

IASA's role in bringing the expertise of large projects in well funded communities and countries to bear on the problems faced by developing countries is well established and much respected. The successful partnerships between some of our members are testament to that program. However, the knowledge we have gained working in those partnerships in paring down our

approach to produce lean programs that still comply with standards should now be turned to our thinking about keeping the previously well funded institutions afloat.

As is most often the case, our IASA members have the wherewithal to bring great expertise to the table and to help all our members manage the challenges we currently face.

One forum in which this debate can grow is at the Frankfurt IASA conference in September 2011. Titled “Digital Sense and Nonsense: Digital Decision Making in Sound and Audiovisual Collections”, the conference will address many of the issues that are made overt by the circumstances we are now faced with. We are a long way down the road of digital preservation. We are past the period of proselytising our belief in the digital solution, or at least we should be: instead we are operating in a mature, standards based, technological environment. So why do so many presentations and papers treat the process like it’s a new thing. We hope to talk about this and the many issues that continue to surface in our archival environment.

I look forward to seeing you all in Frankfurt.

Yours truly,
Kevin Bradley
President IASA

BEFORE CONVERGENCE WAS DIVERGENCE: PUTTING HUMPTY DUMPTY BACK TOGETHER AGAIN¹

Anthony Seeger, UCLA

It is a great honor to have been invited to speak to the assembled members of IASA and AMIA. It is also a great pleasure to be talking with you here in the city of Philadelphia. This city is famous for a number of things, among them that it was for many years the home of Benjamin Franklin, a diplomat, publisher, inventor of a stove, bifocals, and of the recipe for a particular kind of spruce and molasses beer that you can still find in some local taverns. A lesser-known accomplishment of his was that he wrote ballads for his brother’s newspaper in Boston. Not a single copy of his ballads survives. There were fewer archivists then, and we should all be somewhat concerned about the ability of our holdings to be accessible in 250 years. This is also the city in which the United States Constitution was written and signed, with its article on patents and copyrights, which I shall discuss later.

This paper has several parts, each one indicated with a subtitle and introduced with a verse of a song. It takes its title from a nursery rhyme about an egg named Humpty Dumpty who falls off a wall (see Figure 1): “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall/Humpty Dumpty had a great fall/All the king’s horses and all the king’s men/ couldn’t put Humpty Dumpty together again.” My reference to the nursery rhyme means to suggest that part of the problem we will have with convergence is that we are dealing with only fragments of a formerly unified thing – the egg, or the recorded event. Before the king’s men futilely tried to put him together again, the egg/man had smashed into many pieces and could not be reconstituted. This is also partly our problem as multimedia archivists.

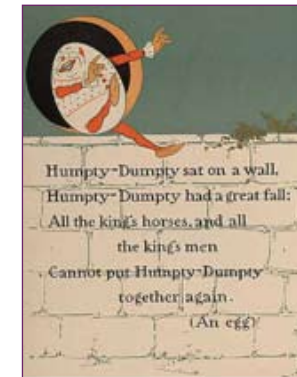


Figure 1. Humpty Dumpty, shown as a riddle with answer, in a 1902 Mother Goose story book by William Wallace Denslow (public domain, from Wikipedia, accessed 9 December 2010).

My presentation begins by describing two divergences that make our attempts at convergence more difficult. It goes on to discuss other challenges to convergence, including the number of people making audiovisual documents today, difficulties of language, intellectual property issues, hardware and software obsolescence, the unique characteristics of each form of media and others. Many of you in the auditorium or reading these words are working on the cutting edge of various kinds of convergence — in cataloging and metadata, digitization, legal issues, multimedia projects, and others. I cannot hope to address the technical details in each of your areas of specialization in any coherent fashion. Instead, my intention in this talk is to add some perspective on the issues you may not have thought much about.

¹ I would like to acknowledge assistance from Aaron Bittel, Stephen Davidson, Any Kolovos, Janice Simpson, for their assistance in planning and delivering this paper.