

FROM INTERNATIONAL SHORTWAVE TO DIGITAL REBROADCAST: TRANSFORMING MUSIC TIME IN AFRICA FOR A NEW WORLDWIDE AUDIENCE

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Radio is the new medium of the 20th century, reinvented over again as new information and communication technologies emerge. Recordings of radio programs, whose value derives from their rarity, uniqueness, and visceral sensory power, are a surprisingly common component of audiovisual archives. Private collectors, national and international broadcasting companies, and community archivists are assembling sizable collections that now have varying degrees of access. When transformed digitally and delivered in new formats and on new platforms, recordings of radio programs have the potential to reshape our understanding of audio [intangible] cultural property in settings where the boundary-spanning nature of information and communication technologies (ICTs) confront the new realities of post colonialism.

This article contextualizes an innovative effort to transform and deliver digitally a forty-year run of radio programs broadcast to the African continent by the Voice of America. The article positions the radio program—*Music Time in Africa*—in the context of international radio in sub-Saharan Africa and summarizes the insights of three research literatures that inform approaches to providing access to musical heritage resources recorded under a wide variety of circumstances. The article concludes with a discussion of pro-active archiving through digital “rebroadcasting” as one possible strategy for overcoming the near universal restrictions on online access.

1. International Radio and Africa

Radio is resurgent across the globe, with a particularly strong hold on the African continent. On World Radio Day 2017 (February 13), UNESCO reported that radio is still the most accessible and affordable medium in the 11 African countries it surveyed.¹ In depth field research by Balancing Act, a London consulting firm, estimates that radio reaches 95 percent of the population across the entire African continent.² The explosive growth of community radio broadcasting and the persistence of international radio broadcasts support the argument that radio never really went away in the face of competition from television and the Internet, but rather has maintained its widespread power to inform and entertain. As broadcast media are transforming from analog to digital and assuming new formats, such as the podcast, radio programming is also beginning to be delivered through social media platforms.³

Perhaps far more so than text and visual resources, broadcast radio is most distinctive for its immediacy, its reach, and its potential effectiveness as an ICT. The invention and widespread

1 UNESCO. World Radio Day 2017. Statistics on Radio. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-radio-day-2013/statistics-on-radio/> “A key feature of African mobile phone use is its convergence with radio listening. Among regular mobile users in Zambia, 33% said they listen to the radio via their handset on a weekly basis, and 25% said they listen on a daily basis. Unlike the use of mobile internet, radio listening is more evenly spread across urban and rural users. However, only 8% of monthly mobile phone users own a mobile phone personally.”

2 Balancing Act: Telecoms, Internet and Broadcast in Africa. <http://www.balancingact-africa.com/>

3 Shaojung Sharon Hong and Junhao Wang. “Voice of America in the Post-Cold War Era: Opportunities and Challenges to External Media Services via New Information and Communication Technology.” *International Communication Gazette* 73, no 4 (2011): 350.

distribution of transistor radios—miniaturized, battery or hand-powered, shock resistant, and personally portable—has made it possible since the early 1960s for people of limited means to receive radio broadcasts virtually anywhere. Former head of audience research for the BBC World Service Graham Mytton writes that “here is an example of a technological innovation developed in the West, meeting one kind of demand there, being transferred very successfully to non-industrialised countries and becoming a very significant innovation there—making, perhaps, even more social, cultural, and political impact than in the West from where it came.”⁴ UK media consultant Mary Myers emphasizes that near universal access to radio signals and devices in Africa (92%–95%)—not yet true for the internet and mobile phones—is a cultural leveling force. “The beauty of radio for the female audience is that, as an affordable, portable, oral/aural medium, it overcomes many of the barriers posed by other ICTs. The advantage of radio for female producers and managers is its relative accessibility in terms of technical specifications and its affordability in terms of initial equipment investment.”⁵

2. The Voice of America (VoA) and Music Time in Africa (MTiA)

The audio collection of interest for the project considered here is a major portion of the Leo Sarkisian Archive, which was the working production studio for the oldest continuous broadcast in English by the Voice of America, *Music Time in Africa*. The program began broadcasting in 1965 and is still on the air, now twice weekly (Saturday and Sunday) for two hours per day.⁶

The Voice of America is a US government federal agency, founded within the Department of State less than three months after the United States entered World War II. The agency found its calling—and significant taxpayer funding—as an instrument of US Cold War policy, reaching audiences with news that, quoting its charter, is “accurate, objective, and comprehensive.”⁷ VoA’s parent body since 1953, the United States Information Agency, aspired to make the Voice of America the world’s leading international broadcaster. A major part of this strategy in the early 1960s was “to swing a little” by producing livelier and more creative programs in both English and foreign language broadcasts.⁸

In 1963, famed broadcaster Edward R. Murrow recruited recording engineer Leo Sarkisian to create a weekly music program aimed at “bringing African music to Africans.”⁹ Leo (as he is affectionately and universally known) was born in 1921 to Armenian immigrants who fled genocide in Turkey. Educated as an artist, he is a self-trained ethnomusicologist, polyglot, and WWII veteran. Prior to joining VoA, Leo was a recording engineer for Tempo Records, a production company based in Hollywood, California that specialized in provid-

4 Graham Mytton, “From Saucepan to Dish: Radio and TV in Africa,” in *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition*, eds. Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 25.

5 Mary Myers, *Gender as a Cross-Cutting Issue*, paper presented to ‘Radio Convergence and Development in Africa’, September 2009 (updated November 2009), 13. <https://www.icafrica.org/en/knowledge-publications/article/radio-convergence-and-development-in-africa-164/>.

6 Voice of America, *Music Time in Africa*. <http://www.voanews.com/z/1456/about>.

7 Ralph A. Uttaro, “The Voices of America in International Radio Propaganda,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 45 (1982): 103–122; see also: Laurien Alexandre, *The Voice of America: From Detente to the Reagan Doctrine* (Norwood, NJ.: Ablex Pub. Corp., 1988).

8 Alan L. Heil, *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

9 Bitrus Paul Gwamna, *Multi-cultural Programming as a Strategy in Public Diplomacy: Leo Sarkisian, and the Voice of America’s ‘Music Time in Africa.’* (PhD diss., Ohio University, 1992).

ing local music for use as background sound in movies.¹⁰ Tempo's most famous contribution was the drumming and chanting tracks in *African Queen* (1951), starring Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn.

Leo had spent the 1950s and into the early 1960s traveling and recording in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and sub-Saharan Africa. Figure 1 is a photograph of recording work in Nigeria in 1965. Substantial documentation exists that Leo secured explicit permission to record and broadcast the music he recorded (Figure 2), but more work needs to be done to broaden the evidence of permissions. Murrow and the State Department charged Leo to create radio stations in newly independent countries in Africa, such as Ghana (independent in 1957), Guinea (1958), and Tanzania (1961) to name but a few, and train local sound recording engineers. He was the first ethnomusicologist to train African sound engineers, making possible African-initiated music archiving that continues to the present time in African radio stations. Leo's field work, his radio program, and his efforts to foster the development of radio stations were intertwined and constituted a critical component of the Voice of America's communication strategy in post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa.

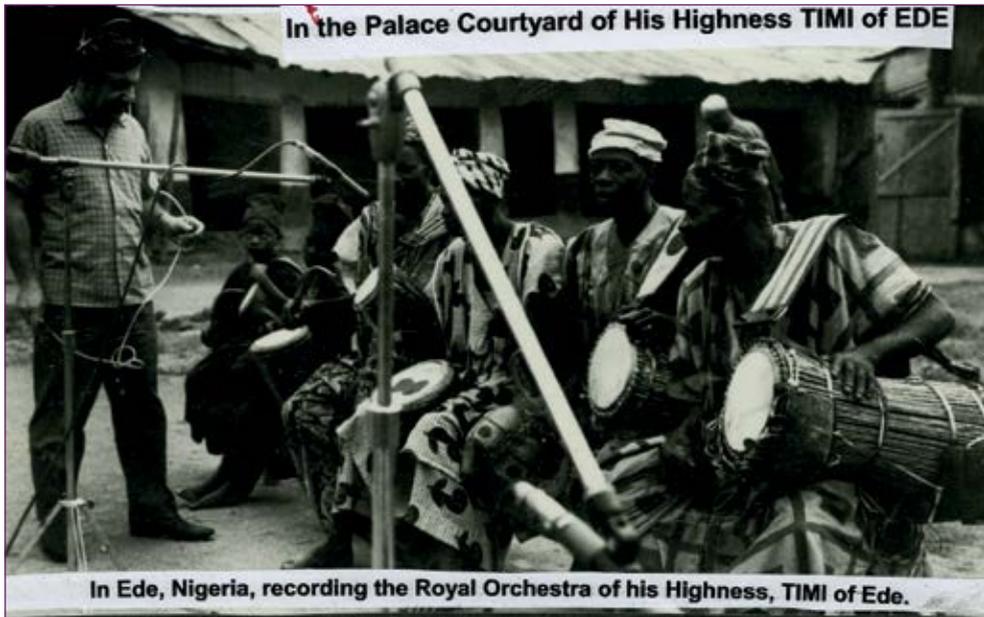


Figure 1. Leo Sarkisian recording TIMI of Ede's drum orchestra in Nigeria, 1965. Source: Leo Sarkisian.

10 Graeme Counsel, "Conserving the Archives of a National Broadcaster in Africa," *Context: Journal of Music Research* 37 (2012): 123.

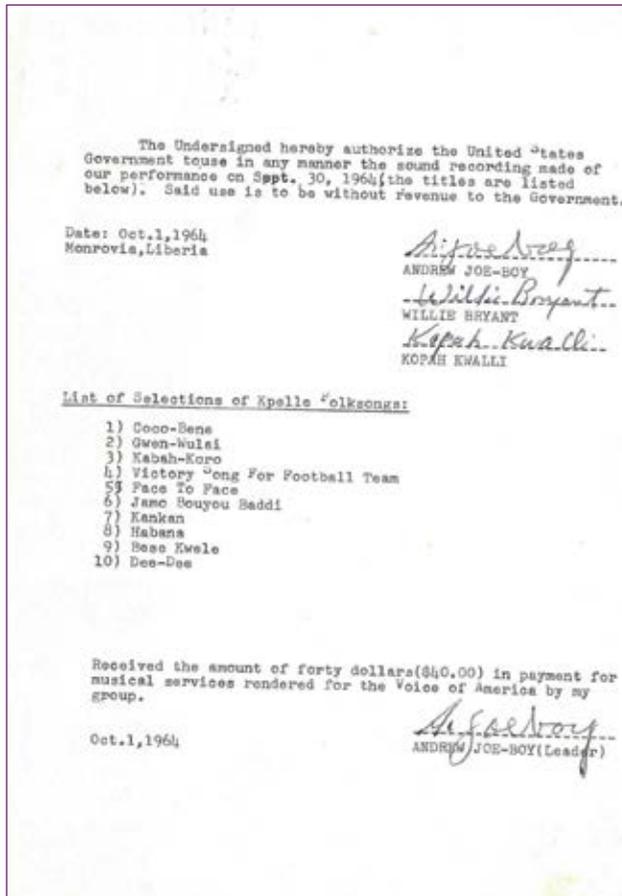


Figure 2. Signed permission to record and broadcast, 1964. Source: Voice of America.

Music Time in Africa (MTiA) was first broadcast in May 1965. Production for MTiA began in Liberia's VoA Program Center, then relocated permanently to the VoA headquarters in Washington, DC in 1968, when Leo was appointed Music Director of the Africa Division. He continued regular travel to Africa for field recording through 1985. Leo Sarkisian directed MTiA through his semi-retirement in 2004 and his full retirement in 2012, at the age of 91. In 2012 the Library of Congress inducted Leo Sarkisian's *Music Time in Africa* into the National Registry of Recorded Sound¹¹ but accessioned only one program into its collection.¹²

11 Jackson Muneza, "Library of Congress Inducts Leo Sarkisian Music Time in Africa recordings into Registry," published on January 23, 2014, video, 7:45. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXQcJrbxcG8>; Heather Maxwell, "Veteran Music Man Leo Sarkisian Says Goodbye." Posted October 2, 2012. <http://blogs.voanews.com/music-time-in-africa/2012/10/02/voas-veteran-music-man-leo-sarkisian-says-goodbye/>.

12 *Music Time in Africa: Mauritania*, July 29, 1973 was enshrined alongside Chubby Checker's "The Twist," Simon & Garfunkel's "Sounds of Silence," and Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon." Library of Congress, National Recording Preservation Board. Recording Registry, 2012. <https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/recording-registry/registry-by-induction-years/2012/>.

2.1 Putting the show together

For four decades, *Music Time in Africa* was a once-per-week 30-minute program, pre-recorded on Wednesday mornings and broadcast on Sunday evenings (18:30 GMT). The program was timed to attract listeners across sub-Saharan Africa just prior to a major two-hour news broadcast on Sunday evenings, *African Panorama*. The US Congress only recently has allowed VoA broadcasts, including *Music Time in Africa*, to be heard inside the United States.¹³

Music Time in Africa was and continues to be a highly choreographed and fully scripted performance of intertwined words and music. Beginning with the first program, Leo assembled musical selections by stringing together recordings drawn from the extensive collections in the program's music library. Leo worked exclusively with fresh 1/4-inch tape, "ripping" selections from 45 rpm singles, 33-1/3 rpm LPs as necessary, or duplicating tapes from his live field recordings or recordings sent to him by radio stations in Africa. Sometimes listener-contributed materials were included, fostering a strong ongoing relationship with local audiences and musicians.

Armed with a 7-inch reel of "cuts" on a theme, Leo wrote and typed a script for the program (Figure 3). Each script weaves together the cuts around a theme and provides contextual information on individual selections. In collaboration with highly skilled sound engineers at VoA's Washington, DC headquarters, the host of *Music Time in Africa* "performed the box" containing a script and a reel of musical selections, timed exactly at 30 minutes (Figure 4). The sonic quality of the narrative program recording was state of the art for an analog recording environment. The resulting tape recordings reflect Leo's skill as a recording engineer and the technical capabilities of Voice of America's broadcasting system.

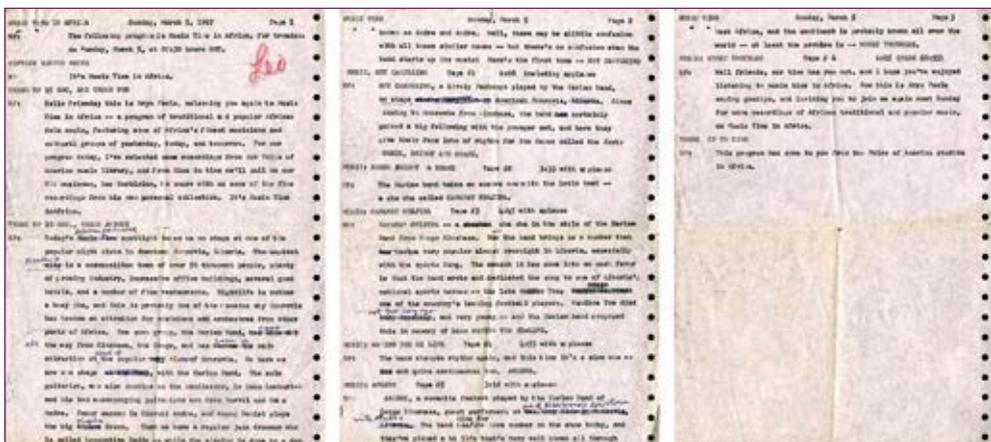


Figure 3. Example of *Music Time in Africa* script, March 5, 1967. Source: Voice of America.

13 National Defense Authorization Act for the Fiscal Year 2013. Public Law No: 112-239 §178. 2013.

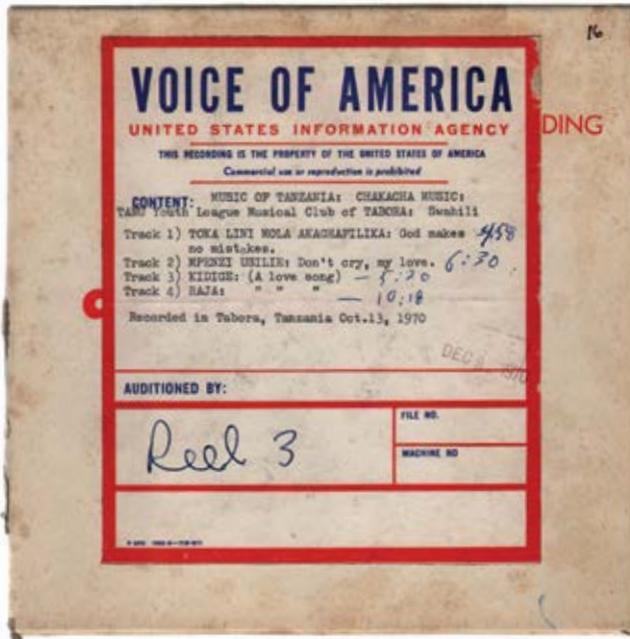


Figure 4. Typical 7" tape box, labeled for Voice of America. Source: Voice of America.

Leo worked with a series of charismatic hosts whose voices became a familiar on-air presence and inspired an outpouring of fan mail (Figure 5):

- Bryn Poole (1965–69), spouse of a VoA station officer in Monrovia, Liberia;
- Susan Moran (1969–1978), VoA staff broadcaster in Washington, DC;
- Rita Rochelle (1978–2005), experienced radio host hired and further trained by Leo;
- Matthew Lavoie (2005–2012), ethnomusicology graduate student of Kelly Askew;
- Heather Maxwell (2012–present), ethnomusicologist trained by Kelly Askew.



Figure 5. Leo Sarkisian and Rita Rochelle in VoA studio, n.d. Source: Voice of America.

Each of these hosts, a number being women of color, projected a personal interest in the listener experience while crediting Leo Sarkisian for the intellectual content. Leo was a regular “guest” on his own program, which afforded him a continuing presence for his listener base and personalized the program around his first-hand knowledge of oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, traditional knowledge, and craftsmanship, what Noriko Aikawa-Faure defines as the “intangible cultural heritage” of the African continent.¹⁴

In making musical selections and particularly in crafting the associated program script, Leo Sarkisian exercised tremendous agency over representations of cultural identity, particularly spiritual life, value systems, visions of cosmology, and social practices of peoples and communities. He embodied the “melting pot” mythology of American-style social democracy and sought, in his programming to promote peace and harmony across distinctive and diverse cultures through the cross-fertilization of music, culture, and dance. The show’s messaging has been immensely popular, as evidenced by over 500 fan letters that the show received every month; Leo and his wife Mary faithfully responded to most of the letters for four decades, enclosing signed photographs, calendars, and program schedules. Host Rita Rochelle inspired at least one fan club (in Nigeria) and traveled with Leo to Africa in the 1980s. In a 2015 interview with Leo and Mary Sarkisian by the authors, Leo shared that his reluctance to retire from VoA stemmed largely from his loyalty to his listener base and his enjoyment in responding to fan mail. The tradition of listener engagement continues to the present through a Facebook presence exceeding 1 million followers and regular exchanges with fans throughout the African continent.¹⁵

2.2 Making the Leo Sarkisian Archive

The VOA’s Leo Sarkisian Library, named in honor of the founder upon his retirement in 2012 at the age of 91, supported all aspects of the creation, production, and delivery of MTiA, from 1965 to 2007, when the program shifted to a digital format (Figure 6). The transfer of the content of the Leo Sarkisian Library at VoA to the University of Michigan transformed a fixed but previously highly organic music library into the Leo Sarkisian Archive, housed in a campus warehouse in 188 archival storage boxes.

14 Noriko Aikawa-Faure, “Safeguarding the African Intangible Cultural Heritage,” in *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Africa: Crisis or Renaissance?* Ed. Kenji Yoshida & John Mack (James Currey, 2008), 96-103.

15 Facebook: Music Time in Africa – MTiA. <https://www.facebook.com/MusicTimeInAfrica/>

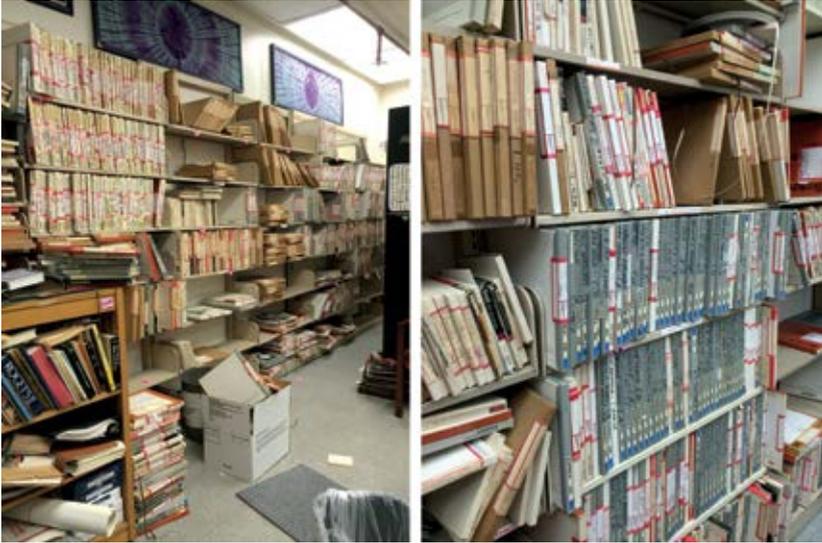


Figure 6. Tape collection in the Leo Sarkisian Library, Washington DC, 2015. Source: Paul Conway.

The heart of the Leo Sarkisian Archive is 361 reels of field recordings that Leo made himself plus many hundreds more recordings created by the radio broadcasters he trained over a thirty-year period. The Archive may be one of the four most important collections of African musical heritage in existence. The others are the Hugh Tracey collection at the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in Grahamstown, South Africa;¹⁶ the Kwabena Nketia collection at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana; and the Gerhard Kubik collection housed privately in Vienna.

The highly curated Sarkisian collection of field recordings, however, exceeds the others in its geographic and musical breadth. More than Tracey or Nketia or Kubik, Leo has embraced the full spectrum of African musical practices. Leo's recordings include not only traditional forms of music, but popular music (ranging from jazz bands to Afro-funk), as well as gospel and African-composed classical music (opera and symphonies). The Sarkisian recordings encompass recordings made by sound engineers he trained across the continent: Radio Tanzania, Radio Comores, Radiodiffusion Nationale Tchadienne (Chad), Radio Dahomey, Radio Rurale (Burkina Faso), Radio Burundi, Radio Douala (Cameroon). Hence the Sarkisian collection is both an individual and collective achievement, begun by one person and then enriched by many others. The collection's value lies, in part, in being a representation of African music that, while catalogued under one individual, preserves the experiences, skills, and choices of many.

The *Music Time in Africa* component of the collection consists of just over 900 discrete recordings from the radio program. The accompanying graphic (Figure 7) shows the distribution of the recordings over the four-decade run (1965–2005) of the original show (excluding the programs developed by hosts Matthew Lavoie and Heather Maxwell). The graph distinguishes the recordings in terms of their completeness for a given date—[platinum=full program + script; gold=full program no script; silver=musical cuts + script;

16 Diane Thram, ed. *For Future Generations: Hugh Tracey and the International Library of African Music* (Grahamstown, South Africa: International Library of African Music, 2010).

bronze=missing elements]. The chart also shows evidence of cannibalization of earlier program recordings for later shows and suggests a high level of “re-broadcasting” of previously developed shows, which is a common practice for programs requiring a weekly program for 52 weeks every year.¹⁷

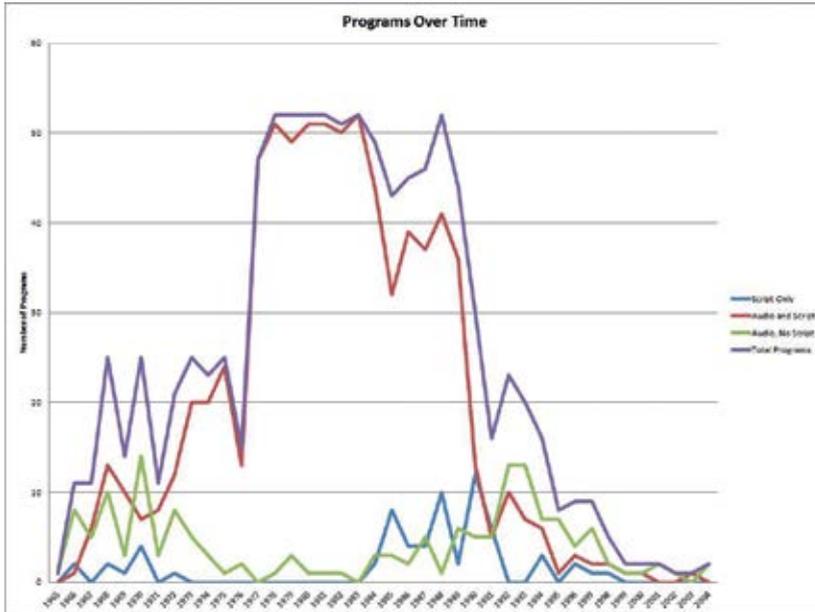


Figure 7. Distribution of programs over time by level of completeness. Source: authors.

3. Ways to Think about Access to Radio and Digital Surrogacy

On the technological level, the digital transformation of radio programs captured on magnetic tape is a “solved problem.”¹⁸ But access to the content in an international context is far more theoretically complex. In our effort to find a deeper meaning and therefore greater value in what is essentially a straightforward digital transformation of radio programs, we have drawn on three fairly distinctive research literatures. These three areas are: (1) theo-

17 Matthew Lavoie, interviewed by Kelly Askew and Paul Conway, February 15, 2017 and Heather Maxwell, interviewed by Paul Conway, November 10, 2016. Both *Music Time in Africa* announcers described multiple scenarios where VoA would authorize the rebroadcast of a previously broadcast entertainment program, including absence of the host due to planned vacation, illness, and official travel to Africa to record music for the program.

18 For the sound recordings, all of which exist on ¼-inch magnetic tape on 7- or 10-inch reels, digitization has been completed under contract to MediaPreserve in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania, in full conformance with the standards (International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives. IASA Technical Committee, *Guidelines on the Production and Preservation of Digital Audio Objects*, ed. by Kevin Bradley. Second edition 2009. (IASA-TC 04). www.iasa-web.org/tc04/audio-preservation) maintained by the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA). Digitization produced uncompressed preservation and production masters in EU Broadcast Wave format at 96 kHz/24 bit; access derivatives in medium resolution MP3 format, as well as digital scans of original tape boxes and tape reels. For the scripts, digitization conforms with the standards and best practices promulgated by the US Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative (Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative. Still Image Working Group. *Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Cultural Heritage Materials*. September 2016. <http://www.digitizationguidelines.gov/guidelines/digitize-technical.html>) Each script page is scanned at 300 dpi, 24 bit depth full color. Equipment is calibrated using the GoldenThread targets and software from Image Science Associates.

ries of the post-modern or post-custodial archive; (2) interdisciplinary performance studies; and (3) ongoing work on digital repatriation and the “anthropology of media” proposed by scholars of ethnomusicology.

3.1 Archival agency

A hallmark of archival science theory in the past 25 years is the recognition that an archive is a socio-political construct rather than a neutral source of evidence for understanding the past. Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar posits the term “archivalization” to describe the “conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving.”¹⁹ For Ketelaar and other post-modern archival theorists, much of the meaning of the archive is in the making and remaking of the archive. The construction of the archive is an exercise of agency through the declaration of archival value, the active intervention by archivists, and in the uses served by the archive over time.²⁰

Digital transformation imposes another layer of archival agency by expanding the boundaries imposed by materiality and physical storage to encompass servers and digital storage systems. Thirty years ago, the late Canadian archivist Hugh Taylor presaged the impact of digital processes on the archive. “Once information enters the computer via the keystroke, OCR, or Raster Scan, space and time as an archivist generally understands them are demolished.”²¹ Paul Conway goes further to demonstrate how the remediation of analog source materials as digital surrogates creates a new archive with its own provenance, new values, and new meaning. In the case of a collection of once-heard radio programs, digital remediation is a particularly powerful act of agency.²²

Agency as a political act embraces uncertainty and resists false dichotomies (e.g., open/closed; public/private). For South African archival theorist Verne Harris, who has been writing on ethics and the archive for over two decades, opening an archive should often require an ethical leap of faith for the greater good. “A professional acts ethically not when she keeps politics at bay, but when she finds a just politics in action.”²³ Ethical access to cultural heritage sound recordings is such a leap of faith: a leap over the Gordian-knotted constrictions of international legal copyright control to action done in tandem with and in conscious respect for the prerogatives of community norms.

While embracing the audiovisual archive as fundamental, South African sound studies scholar Anette Hoffmann is particularly concerned about the multiple layers of selectivity that serve to disassociate sound recordings housed in (often distant) archives from their cultural contexts, in a delocalization process she terms “colonial acousmêtres,” or “archiving of what often are fragments of repertoires of a wide variety of genres of orature, from which speakers and singers chose their narratives and songs that were then recorded. These fragments were, much like ethnographic objects in the museum, stored in a way that disconnected

19 Eric Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives,” *Archival Science* 1, no. 1 (2001): 133.

20 Francis X Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

21 Hugh Taylor, “Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?” *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88): 20.

22 Paul Conway, “Digital Transformations and the Archival Nature of Surrogates,” *Archival Science* 15, no. 1 (2015): 51-69.

23 Verne Harris, “Ethics and the Archive: ‘An Incessant Movement of Recontextualization,’” in *Controlling the Past: Documenting Society and Institutions*, ed. Terry Cook (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011), 354.

them from a body of knowledge, or theorising, or poetry (or all of these)."²⁴ Her work on recordings of African prisoners of war in WWI is a compelling demonstration of the power of reconnecting long-lost voices to their communities of origin.

3.2 Performance and the archive

Radio programming that combines spoken word and musical performances is particularly challenging to make available to wider audiences in part because the voice of the announcer belongs to the broadcaster while the rights of the associated musical content may be far more complex. The vibrant field of performance studies scholarship has much to say about the relationship of an archive of radio programs and the performative aspects of the scripted programs as well as the underlying musical content.

Theater and radio share the embodied ephemerality of live performance, which Stanford University English scholar Peggy Phelan argues is defined in terms of disappearance. "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance."²⁵ Diana Taylor agrees but recognizes the value of surrogate recordings for understanding the nature of performance. "A video of a performance is not the performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a *thing* in itself."²⁶ In her foundational work, Taylor notes a rift between the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (spoken language, song, and dance) and the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones). Exploring the relationships between the two is at the core of performance studies scholarship.

Rebecca Schneider agrees in principle with Taylor but extends Phelan's notion of disappearance to the archive itself. "... The archivable object also becomes itself through disappearance—as it becomes the trace of that which remains when performance (the artist's action) disappears." Hers is a wonderful post-modern view of the archive as subjective ephemeral trace rather than objective evidence, and allows for the acceptance of a recorded performance as "a social performance of retroaction." She continues: "The archive performs the institution of disappearance, with object remains as indices of disappearance."²⁷ In the context of radio as performance, the insightful work of Taylor and Schneider provides a way of examining in tandem the disappearances of the underlying musical content and cultural context in the creation of a broadcast radio program that exists in ephemeral memory unless embodied as a trace recording.

Georgia Tech media scholar Philip Auslander argues forcefully for greater attention to music in performance studies scholarship, both in the context of music in theater and straight-up musical performances. He embraces recorded music as embodying legitimate performance, extending the concept of repertoire and affect into the realm of recordings of live musical performances and even to the studio work of contemporary popular musicians. "Regardless of the ontological status of recorded music, its phenomenological status for listeners is that

24 Anette Hoffmann, "Introduction" *Listening to Sound Archives*, *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 79.

25 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

26 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.

27 Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 6, no. 2 (2001): 105.

of a performance unfolding at the time and in the place of listening.”²⁸ Auslander’s work over two decades provides grounding for the emergent field of sound studies, which shares with performance studies a critical stance regarding the archival record. He goes so far as to dispute the higher value attached to live performance and the “im-mediate” and contends that “within our mediatized culture, whatever distinction we may have supposed there to be between live and mediatized events is collapsing because live events are increasingly either made to be reproduced or are becoming ever more identical with mediatized ones.”²⁹

3.3 Digital repatriation

Post-modern notions of archival agency and the archival complexities driving performance studies cross paths in the movement to repatriate tangible evidence of intangible cultural heritage to originating communities. For decades, scholars have recognized and attempted to respond to inequities that surround large collections of sound recordings taken, removed, and “disappeared” from local settings and collected, preserved, and “hidden” in archives far from their originating communities.³⁰ A deeply troubling inequity is the implications of “spiriting away” the intangible cultural heritage of a local population, often with confusing permissions obtained long ago, where time and distance have created nearly insurmountable barriers to the use of these recordings by local communities.³¹ Barriers are further complicated by the “machine dependency” of sound recordings in communities without reliable electricity and ICT infrastructure.

For at least 20 years, scholars who work at the boundaries of anthropology and ethnomusicology in the African context have explored the value and complexity of returning recordings housed in distant or inaccessible archives. Robert Lancefield argues that the act of repatriation is “a vital part of the world-flow of music that are tangible precipitates of once-evanescent sounds still close to people’s hearts.”³² Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion, among others, promote repatriation as an activist stance that both fosters new scholarly research and provides a benefit to the communities from which recordings have been made. “Such approaches to the archiving enterprise can be understood as ‘proactive archiving’, which is when access to collections is initiated by the archive itself, as opposed to ‘reactive archiving’ whereby the users of an archive initiate access.”³³ Elizabeth Mackinlay goes further in calling for “decolonization” of archival and ethnomusicological engagements in which scholars and archivists “reimagine words such as rights as ‘response-ability,’ resources and research as ‘relationships,’ and reconciliation as ‘resurgence.’”³⁴

28 Philip Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14, no. 1 (2004): 5.

29 Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 35.

30 Catherine Grant, “Rethinking Safeguarding: Objections and Responses to Protecting and Promoting Endangered Musical Heritage,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21, no. 1 (2012): 46.

31 Ricardo Punzlan, “Archival Diasporas: A Framework for Understanding the Complexities and Challenges of Dispersed Photographic Collections,” *American Archivist* 77, no. 2 (2014): 346.

32 Robert C. Lancefield, “Musical Traces’ Retractable Paths: The Repatriation of Recorded Sound,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 35, no. 1 (1998): 60.

33 Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion, “We’re all Archivists Now: Towards a More Equitable Ethnomusicology,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21, no. 2 (2012): 137.

34 Elizabeth Mackinlay, “Decolonization and Applied Ethnomusicology,” *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2015), 396.

Repatriation and pro-active archiving efforts in Africa have taken multiple forms, including the presentation of analog copies of recordings to Ugandan communities,³⁵ the gifting of original magnetic recordings to communities in South Africa³⁶ or LP records to Aboriginal communities in Australia.³⁷ Elizabeth Klesmith notes that one of the most significant barriers to the repatriation of tangible culture, ranging from archaeological artifacts to human remains, is the limited ability of local communities to protect and make use of returned objects, given their dependency on playback machinery.³⁸

Archivists and ethnomusicologist are looking to digital technologies to transcend some of the limitations of artifact repatriation. Ricardo Punzalan has advanced a theory of “virtual reunification” that supports the use of digital technologies to reunite dispersed or expropriated cultural collections.³⁹ Proactive archiving projects have returned digitized radio programs on thumb drives to Haitians devastated by natural disasters that destroyed local radio stations.⁴⁰ Noel Lobley, drawing on a mix of digital technologies and performance, has experimented with re-performing the recordings with equipment installed on the backs of donkeys.⁴¹ Similar efforts at combining performance and pro-active archiving have taken place with London’s Somalian diaspora.⁴² Glenn Patterson’s full-circle work with a local community in Quebec, Canada combines the return of historical recording and the gathering of new performances.⁴³ Although the results are mixed and small-scale, all of these efforts share a desire to return what was once taken, with return involving establishing new, personally direct, and ethically sensitive relationships with local communities.

4. Conclusion—Beyond Digitization to Ethical Access

The *Music Time in Africa* project is a model of a transformative audiovisual digitization project, whereby the value added through digital tools makes new knowledge possible and new ways of connecting audiovisual resources to new communities on a worldwide basis. In the case of *Music Time in Africa* and similar collections of musical heritage recordings, innovation in access is not nearly as straightforward as the technical components. We conclude with our efforts to sort out the ethics of intellectual property and to make connections with local communities—at scale online rather than through personal intervention.

As a federal government agency broadcasting internationally, the Voice of America and all of its organizational units are exempt by statute from the property rules that bind the commercial and private sectors.⁴⁴ Setting aside the ethical correctness of such exemptions, VoA need

35 Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Andrew N. Weintraub, “The Audible Future: Reimagining the Role of Sound Archives and Sound Repatriation in Uganda,” *Ethnomusicology* 56, no. 2 (2012): 206-233.

36 Thram, *For Future Generations*.

37 Sally Treloyn, Matthew Dembal Martin, and Rona Googinda Charles, “Cultural Precedents for the Repatriation of Legacy Song Records to Communities of Origin,” *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2016): 94.

38 Elizabeth A. Klesmith, “Nigeria and Mali: The Case for Repatriation and Protection of Cultural Heritage in Post-Colonial Africa,” *Notre Dame Journal of International & Comparative Law* 4, no. 1 (2014): 47-75.

39 Ricardo Punzalan, “Understanding Virtual Reunification,” *Library Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2014): 298.

40 Craig Breden and Laura Wagner, “The Digital Repatriation Audio of the Radio Haiti Archive,” paper presented at IASA 2016 Annual Conference, Washington, DC, 25-29 September 2016.

41 Noel Lobley, “Curating sound for future communities,” in *Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (Palgrave, 2015), 234-247; Noel Lobley, “Taking Xhosa Music out of the Fridge and into the Townships,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21, no. 2 (2012): 181-195.

42 Emma Brinkhurst, “Archives and Access: Reaching Out to the Somali Community of London’s King’s Cross” *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 21:2 (2012): 243-258.

43 Glenn Patterson, “Digitization, Recirculation and Reciprocity: Proactive Archiving for Community and Memory on the Gaspé Coast and Beyond,” *MUSICultures* 41, no. 1 (2014): 102-132.

44 National Defense Authorization Act for the Fiscal Year 2013. Public Law No. 112-239 §178. 2013.

not ask permission to broadcast third-party content nor pay royalties to copyright holders. The physical tape recordings made by Leo Sarkisian and his associates are US government property (and labeled as such). The typed and annotated scripts, as well as the spoken segments of the recorded programs spoken by the hosts are in the public domain. So one option for access is to simply invoke the right of rebroadcast specified in recent reauthorizing legislation and ignore the complexities of international and local copyright laws and the transnational music industry that feeds on and profits from this complexity.⁴⁵

But is this the right thing to do, especially in the context of the long history of cultural appropriation that is at the heart of the digital repatriation movement? Ethically, the selections of music included in *Music Time in Africa* broadcasts belong to the original performers and their communities. The ethical challenge of access to this music extends to questions of whether excerpts from longer commercial and non-commercial works can stand alone apart from the textual references in the scripts assembled by Leo Sarkisian. It is unlikely but possible that some of the underlying field music recordings made by Leo Sarkisian have commercial value that could devolve to descendants of the original performers. And yet the passage of time and death from disease and old age has claimed the lives of many African citizens who would likely remember and be able to locate the source of the recordings. Therefore, much of the material included in *Music Time in Africa* is “orphaned” in the ontological, if not the legal sense of the term.⁴⁶

A primary goal of the *Music Time in Africa* project is to explore the feasibility of a performer/community based process of access validation, which we have dubbed “ethical access.” Our focus is on the prerogatives of performer communities to express their access preferences for the radio programs. Ample evidence exists from fan mail compilations and unpublished internal reports that the VoA radio broadcasts have been a continuing source of pride for musicians and their local communities. A sonic and bodily form of sociality enacted through performance, music binds people into a community, both within and across ethnic lines. Access carries with it a *scholarly responsibility* to engage performers, their descendants, and their communities in a dialogue on their music and its meaning to wider audiences.

The fundamental challenges in repatriating recordings of radio broadcasts is the borderless nature of radio and its reach across borders of all sorts. It may be that the very nature of radio in the digital era may provide the mechanism for community repatriation. For this project the key to our connections with the African continent is active engagement of the vast listener base for the current on-air version of *Music Time in Africa*. This listener base is reached directly through current broadcasting channels as well as through the extensive social media presence that the broadcast enjoys. Through our collaboration with the Voice of America, the project team will work in tandem with the curated social media presence of the current manifestation of the program, including active blogging and a highly popular Facebook presence.⁴⁷ Through these channels, we will alert listeners to the project and invite them to visit and engage with the radio programs. Using a variety of standard feedback mechanisms, the project will capture the attention of people who have tuned in to *Music Time in Africa* for decades and invite them to participate in valuing the musical performances that Leo Sarkisian collected for their communities of performers.

45 Reebee Garofalo, “Whose World, What Beta: The Transnational Music Industry, Identity, and Cultural Imperialism” *The World of Music* 35, no 2 (1993): 16-32.

46 Peter B. Hirtle, Emily Hudson and Andrew T. Kenyon, *Copyright and Cultural Institutions: Guidelines for Digitization for U.S. Libraries, Archives, and Museums*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2009).

47 As of Dec 1, 2017, the official Facebook page for Music Time in Africa logs 1,084,690 followers.

With even limited success implementing a community based “ethical access” process, the project has the potential to reinvent the ways that live field recordings are opened for wider use. Especially in countries that have suffered war and turmoil such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, the rebroadcast of the radio programs through social media will provide direct and persistent access to their musical heritage. And even in countries that have not suffered conflict and mass upheaval, for example Kenya⁴⁸ and Tanzania⁴⁹, limited capacity to safeguard audio collections in under-resourced public institutions resulted in attrition and loss. Yet access to historical sources of musical production is greatly limited, as is the local capacity of radio stations, ministries of culture, music organizations and universities to preserve their musical heritages.

Since nearly its birth in the early twentieth century, international radio broadcasting has been a powerful tool for governmental organizations, non-profits, and the commercial sector that wish to influence opinion, market products, and affect change in the short and long term behaviors of a listening audience. Short and medium range radio signals recognize no national boundaries—boundaries that in part exist for the economic, political, and social control of the use and reuse of cultural heritage property.

An original radio broadcast is understood to be a profoundly ephemeral performance. For listeners a broadcast exists at a moment in time and then becomes an ethereal memory, notable more for its disappearance and anticipated return than for its affect, which may be socially cumulative rather than instantaneous. A recording of a radio program by either broadcaster or listener, incidental to its initial performance, is an embodied referent, capable of invoking memory or triggering new associations. The chain of radio broadcast, listener experience, and memory is thus highly contingent on the construction of an archive. In the context of historical radio programs, the archive is not simply made accessible to memory but is transformed, materially and conceptually as an agent for “(re)membering” new audiences. An archive of radio broadcasts, created and kept apart from an original listening audience and then digitally transformed, embodies intangible musical cultural heritage made manifest, heard once from a geographically and culturally distant place, decades ago, but that now lives on as residual digital memory.

Auslander, however, would have us reconsider the associations of archival mediatized performances as second-order residual vestiges of a live performance inherently superior in value. Because the musical performances Leo and his counterparts at African radio stations recorded were done so for the purpose of radio broadcast, lines are blurred between liveness and archival artefact. “The im-mediate is not prior to mediation but derives precisely from the mutually defining relationship between the im-mediate and the mediated. Similarly, live performance cannot be said to have ontological or historical priority over mediatization, since liveness was made visible [or audible] only by the possibility of technical reproduction.... Our argument is that the very concept of live performance presupposes that of reproduction—that the live can exist only *within* an economy of reproduction.”⁵⁰

48 National Public Radio story on Hugh Tracey’s Kenyan recordings: <http://www.npr.org/2015/06/28/417462792/in-a-kenyan-village-a-65-year-old-recording-comes-home>.

49 See the Tanzania Heritage Project website, an effort seeking to revive and preserve what remains at RTD: <http://tanzaniaheritageproject.org/>.

50 Auslander 1999: 57; Auslander also makes interesting points about the oxymorons that inhere to concepts of “live broadcast” and “recorded live” (*ibid.*:60), but we’ll set that aside for now.

The need to preserve and make available an imperiled audiovisual cultural heritage is the twenty-first century's brittle-books crisis. The interplay of physical, intellectual, and legal constraints is the next challenge to the survival of vital and vast segments of the world's cultural heritage. Without creative innovation in accessibility, audiovisual resources of the second half of the twentieth century face inevitable and catastrophic loss.

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