ARCHIVES


Mireille Helffer and Anne de Sales

Early in the sixties, anthropologists and linguists within the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) started to collect oral and specifically musical traditions of various groups in Nepal. In 1966 the ethnomusicologist Mireille Helffer joined them and within a research programme directed by Prof. Millot, conducted several missions focusing on musical collections. Dr. Helffer then supervised the listing of all the collected documents - about 500 tapes that were presented to the Department of Ethnomusicology in the Musée de l'Homme. Each recorded tape was copied and classified in a file describing its contents (duration, place and conditions of recording, as well as the subject). A copy of the file was given to the collector. This is how Marc Gaborieau, Mireille Helffer, Corinne Jest, Alexandre W. Macdonald, Philippe Sagant, and to a lesser extent Jean-François Mouel and Alain Fournier, presented their recordings between 1960 and 1975. A copy of Bernard Pigène's recordings (1958) was added to this very rich collection representing the Indo-Nepalese castes, including the Muslims, as well as most of the ethnic groups of Nepal.

It is regrettable that, since then, researchers who have carried out fieldwork, have ceased to present their recorded documents to the Department of Ethnomusicology in the Musée de l'Homme.

CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTIONS

1) The Indo-Nepalese castes
Two rich sets of recordings emerge. The first one concerns the Gâme repertoire, popular songs of the jhyâre type, ritual songs such as mîlsiri gîr and panegyric songs of the karkha type. Numerous missions were concerned with this caste of beggar-singers:
- 1961-62: A.W. Macdonald, assisted by Dor Bahadur Bista, recorded about a hundred pieces accompanied on the violin sarangi.
- 1966: survey by M. Helffer in the Kathmandu Valley and central Nepal (Pokhara area, Baglung etc.).
- 1966-70: recordings by M. Gaborieau in the Kathmandu valley and the Gorkha area.
- 1965-70: recordings by C. Jest.

The second important set of documents concerns the caste of tailors-musicians, the Damâi, recordings of whom were made in various areas of Nepal. In 1969, during a mission in Dadeldhura (West Nepal), M. Gaborieau and M. Helffer collected an exceptionally rich body of musical material on the dholi-hukkîya. Besides these two specifically musical sets, various other recordings should be mentioned:
- tales and accounts related by Bahun and Chetri;
- recordings of linguistic interest;
- documents concerning the Muslims of the Kathmandu Valley and of Central Nepal (M. Gaborieau).

2) The ethnic groups
Musical samples were recorded among several ethnic groups such as the Chantel (C. Jest), the Gurung (B. Pigène and Champion), the Hayu (C. Jest), the Limbu P. Sagant), the Magar (C. Jest), the Newar (M. Helffer, C. Jest, G. Toffin), the Sherpa (C. Jest, A.W. Macdonald), the Tamang (M. Gaborieau, M. Helffer, C. Jest, A.W. Macdonald) and among Tibetan populations of the high Himalayan valleys.

These recordings illustrate various musical genres: seasonal songs accompanying work in the fields, planting out or harvesting rice, songs sung while gathering in the forest, sheep- or yak-herding songs and festival songs. The narrative songs are represented by the Indian epics of the Mahâbhârata and the Râmâyana and by the Tibetan epic of Gesar, as well as by chanteables (bâi), by heroic accounts (bhirat) from West Nepal (to be compared with repertoire from Kumaon) and by such foundation myths as the Tamang khâi and the Limbu mundhum.

Other recordings include performances by various categories of religious intercessors (jhâkri, lha-pa, puimbo) as well as ritual music of the Tibetan Buddhist and Bonpo traditions.

COLLECTIONS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

About a hundred musical instruments collected in Nepal by various researchers, especially by C. Jest, are kept in the Department of Ethnomusicology in the Musée de l'Homme. The instrumental range of the Damâi is represented (long trumpets, oboes, kettledrums of various sizes, and cymbals). Among the drums used by the religious intercessors there are single-sided drums such as the snshe of the Gurung, the ring of the Chantel, the damphu of the Tamang, as well as double-sided drums like the dhyâgro. Mention should also be made of lutes (sgra-snyan), small fiddles with sympathetic strings (the stâang of the pÂkâ), hourglass drums (the hudkô of the dhol) and a few instruments used by the Newar.

USE MADE OF THE COLLECTIONS

The collected recordings have been used for the sound-tracks of films and for exhibitions, and provided the basis for the following publications:
1969b: Castes de Musiciens au Népal, record 30cm/"t, Musée de l'Homme LD 20, with a booklet in French and English, the Nepali text of the songs, photos, musical notations (no longer available).


CONCLUSION
This collection is the legacy of an era when neither radios or cassette players were known in Nepal. It can therefore be used as a reference that enables one to evaluate the changes in repertoire and styles over a period of more than 30 years. A number of works in progress are using the collection in this way (J. Giööd, C. Tingey, Ph. Ramirez, H. Weissenauenten).

It is hoped that this summary will encourage young researchers to deposit their recorded documents with descriptive files in archives where they can be consulted. Only in this way can they be of value to future research.