

THE BHUTANESE MATERIALS OF THE JOHN LEVY COLLECTION
IN THE SCHOOL OF SCOTTISH STUDIES SOUND ARCHIVE,
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

by Mark Trewin

John Levy (1910-1976), recordist, musicologist and theologian, made more than 700 field recordings, mostly of excellent quality, between the years 1958-1972 from many parts of the world, including India (1958-1962), Sri Lanka (1960), Iceland (1961), China (1963) South Korea (1964) and Taiwan (1964 and 1969). Other materials include several thousand photographs, 16mm cine films, and several hundred LP recordings (including the 18 he himself produced).

His visit to Bhutan in September-November 1971, facilitated by Michael Aris (at that time tutor to the royal family), was his last foreign trip before a motorcycle accident in the UK led to his early death. Upon the suggestion of Madeau Stewart at the BBC (who had produced his radio talks on Bhutanese music in 1972, among others), these recordings, together with the rest of the collection, were bequeathed to the School of Scottish Studies (which John Levy had first contacted in 1962 when researching possible connections between the music of Iceland and the Northern Isles of Scotland).

The wealth of material was left in some disarray by its collector, and over the years a numbers specialists have worked on parts of the archive. The Bhutanese materials were sorted and catalogued by Ricardo Canzio, and his work is gratefully acknowledged.

Levy's published recordings of Bhutanese music (LLST 7255-8), recently re-issued on CD, are among his most valuable contributions, but they are, of course, only representative samples of the original field recordings. The following report is intended to briefly survey the entire Bhutanese holdings, with a view to promoting its research potential.

List of Holdings

The Bhutanese recordings consist of 46 reels of field recordings made on a Nagra S (JL/71/3-48, with copies JLX 224-255), 7 LPs (LLST 7255-8 and BBC 34691-3) with accompanying documentation, together with miscellaneous materials including photographs, correspondence and other items.

The recordings are catalogued and indexed along with the others in the Levy Collection. The Chronological Register of Recordings gives essential information (tape number, place, date, informant, title/cue, type genre, indexer's comments), while the Card Index includes copies of Levy's own typed field notes for each tape.

Contents of the Recordings

Liturgical Music

Kyichu Lhakhang (*rnying-ma-pa* monastery), Paro Valley

JL171/9-12 Ceremony dedicated to *rdo-rje sems-dpa'*. Recorded 3.10.71

JL/71/23-25 Annual Festival of *sgrub-chen*. [cf. LLST 7257 Side A] Recorded 11.10.71

Tashichö Dzong (*'brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa* monastery), Thimphu

JL/71/16-21 and 27-28 [cf. LLST 7255 Side A and Side B, tracks 1-5 and 11] Various instrumental items (including "the 11 ways of playing the *dung-chen*"), and chants. Recorded 6-7.10.71 and 19.10.71

Tongsa Dzong (*'brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa* monastery),

JL/71/36 Supplication rite for Guru Padmasambhava [cf. LLST 7256 Side B] Recorded 29.10.71

JL/71/37-38 *bla-ma nor-bu rgya mtsho* rite [cf. LLST 7256 Side A, Tracks 3-5] Recorded 31.10.71

JL/71/39 *cham* masked dances [cf. LLST 7256 Side A, Tracks 1-2] Recorded 1.11.71

Jampai Lhakhang (*rnying-ma-pa* monastery), Chokor Valley, Bumthang

JL/71/42-43 Miscellaneous items from an annual festival [cf. LLST 7257 Side B] Recorded 3-4.11.71

Punakha Dzong (*'brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa* nunnery)

JL/71/45-46 *smiyung-gnas* rite [cf. LLST 7255 Side B, tracks 6-8] Recorded 11.11.71 (mono)

Para-liturgical Music

This includes *mantra* recitations (JL/71/35) and bardic recitation (JL/71/113), recorded from *manip* in Thimphu and Tongsa, a number of Milarepa songs, probably from Paro (JL/71/14), and an *a-che lha-mo* performance in Thimphu (JL/71/26). Several of these recordings are represented on the published discs.

Ceremonial Music

There is one item of processional music performed by a drum and reed ensemble in Thimphu, apparently similar to those found in other Himalayan regions; plus two versions of the Bhutanese National Anthem played by the European-derived military and pipe bands of the Royal Bhutanese Guards in Thimphu (JL/71/16).

Folk Music

There are approximately 100 songs, dances and solo instrumental items (mainly the *sgra-snyan* lute) recorded from a number of performers from different regions of Bhutan and Tibet. A range of genres are represented, and include Gesar songs, praise songs, and songs accompanying a sword dance and archery competition. Several items were released on LLST 7258.

Documentation: Song Texts, Notations and Translations

Wherever possible, Levy obtained copies of the written texts of the song forms he recorded. Most of these texts are on single leaves in manuscript, xerox, or photographic form, and in either block or cursive Tibetan scripts. These have now been collated and bound, together with the English translations provided by Philip Denwood for those items selected by Levy for publication.

In addition there are several sets of Tibetan folios of liturgical texts. These, being perhaps of greatest interest, are itemized in the following list of texts and notations in the collection which correspond to the recordings of liturgical music (refer above):

JL/71/9-12 *dpal rdo rje sems dpa' thugs kyi sgrub pa'i bsnyen sgrub phrin las kyi chog rnam lam gzang zhes bya ba bzhugs so* [42 folios]

JL/71/23-25 *klong chen snying gi thig le las: rig 'dzin thugs sgrub dpal chen 'dus pa bzhugs* [19 folios]

JL/71/16-21 and 27-28 Sixteen texts on single sheets accompanying these short recitations, with translations;

JL/71/36 *Padmasambhava gsol 'debs, smon lam, le'u bdun pa* [53 folios, with translation]

JL/71/37-38 *bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho* [musical notation].

Other documentation includes Levy's original field notes, correspondence (principally with Michael Aris, but also Hugh Richardson, David Snellgrove, Philip Denwood, Laurence Picken and others), LP sleeve notes, transcripts of his three radio talks, record reviews (including Crossley-Holland 1974), newspaper clippings and maps.

Discography

BBC 34691-3 *Music from Bhutan*. Three radio talks. BBC 1972.

LLST 7255 *Rituals of the Drukpa Order from Thimphu and Punakha* [Tibetan Buddhist Rites from the Monasteries of Bhutan, Vol.1]. Recording and commentary by John Levy, Lyrichord 1973.

LLST 7256 *Sacred Dances and Rituals of the Nyingmapa and Drukpa Orders* [Tibetan Buddhist Rites from the Monasteries of Bhutan, Vol.2]. Recording and commentary by John Levy, Lyrichord 1973.

LLST 7257 *Temple Rituals and Public Ceremonies* [Tibetan Buddhist Rites from the Monasteries of Bhutan, Vol.3]. Recording and commentary by John Levy. Lyrichord 1973.

LLST 7258 *Tibetan and Bhutanese Instrumental and Folk Music* [Vol.4]. Recording and commentary by John Levy. Lyrichord 1973.

Bibliography

Crossley-Holland, P.

1974, "Review of LLST 7255-58", *Ethnomusicology*, 18(3), p. 463-467.

Helffer, M.

1976, "Review of LLST 7255-58", *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, 7, p.180-183.

For further information: please contact the curator, Dr Mark Trewin, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, 27-29 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9L, Scotland.

ABOUT BHUTANESE MUSIC

Note from the editors

The inventory of Bhutanese music presented by Mark Trewin gives us the opportunity to once more emphasize the importance of collecting and localising information of old documents, keeping in mind the constant and important changes in musical expression accelerated by the media (TV programmes and films) and easy access to all kinds of recordings (cassettes, etc.).

There are a number of changes taking place in Bhutan and which might affect the musical life of this country.

In October 1995, the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs of the Royal Government of Bhutan organised a three-day musical competition to 'preserve, promote and improve Bhutanese music'.

The performances comprised: a cappella classical songs, *zhungdra*, court songs and dances, *boedra*, and modern songs, *rigsar*.

The following editorial, published in *Kuensel*, the weekly newspaper of Bhutan, in October 14, 1995, should serve to remind those interested in 'traditional' music of the risk of its replacement by contemporary music.

"The general response (to the festival) came as a shock to the organizers and to some in the audience. Boedra was tolerated, rigsar was a smash hit, but zhungdra performers, selected singers from rural Thimphu were "booed" by the crowd...

Yet, under the circumstances, it was inevitable, it was even understandable. Above all, it was a clear indication of the change taking place within the society.

The loud categories of music like rock music and what is known locally as "disco" type music have come into the country and are here to stay. As more people, especially the younger generation, are influenced through film and other media, it will pick up momentum.

It was visible last week, The rigsar category was popular partly because of the use of synthesizers and modern instruments. Its other effect was the rhythm and dance beat which young fans prefer. Meanwhile the boedra category was also appreciated for its use of accompaniment, both traditional and modern instruments. It was seen as less formal than zhungdra.

It is perhaps desirable that, if music is to change and develop, it should happen to Bhutanese music and Bhutanese artists so that bhutanese youth can be involved with the changes rather than their identifying with imported music....

The bottom line is that such traditional art forms (like zhungdra) may be lost with the passing generation".