

# FIND, GET, USE: LESSONS FROM THE REPATRIATION OF EARLY PAPUA NEW GUINEA SOUND RECORDINGS

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For over forty years, first as a graduate student and then as a public servant at a cultural research institution, I have been involved in various aspects of the repatriation of early sound recordings to Papua New Guinea. Consequently, the subject of this workshop in Shanghai was of great interest to me. I was honoured and thrilled to be invited back to Shanghai after visiting this city for International Council for Traditional Music Executive Board meetings (2012, 2013) and its World Conference (2013).<sup>1</sup>

I particularly hope that some of our own experiences in repatriation will benefit those working on this subject in China and beyond. So let's move far to the south of China, and to quite a different time frame.

Papua New Guinea is located north of Australia and to the east of Indonesia. According to the most recent edition of *Ethnologue* (Simons and Fennig 2017), its approximately 7.6 million people speak about 840 living languages, making Papua New Guinea the most linguistically diverse nation on earth.

Since 1979, I have worked in the Music Department of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, a cultural research institute funded by the Papua New Guinea government. One of our goals has been to make our Music Archive collection representative of all research that has been done on music in the country.<sup>2</sup> While we are well aware that this is something that must be an ongoing, never-ending task, it continues to motivate our activities on many levels. To achieve this, it has been vitally important to bring back early sound recordings to Papua New Guinea, where these recordings have the greatest meaning. We also feel very strongly that new research should be done with full knowledge of what has been done before. All research builds upon what others have done before, so Papua New Guineans must have easy access to such materials in Papua New Guinea itself. Hence, national repatriation of audiovisual as well as print materials has long been a key objective for the Institute.

Others Institute staff and I have written about such early recordings and our repatriation efforts (e.g., Niles 1992; 2000; 2002; 2012; Niles and Gende 2017; Niles and Schüller 2010; To'Liman-Turalir 2002). My article here concerns this work in general and is divided into what have been the three main tasks in repatriation for us.

## Find

The first step is to find out what early recordings have been made, by whom, when, where they were made, and where they are presently located.<sup>3</sup> For the early recordings, this work initially involved consulting published catalogues from major archives, corresponding with archivists, and canvassing all available early writings for any suggestions that recordings were being made. Locating more recent recordings combined these methods with communicating with those who may have made such recordings, in particular anthropologists, linguists, and other researchers and visitors. Although recording equipment was certainly readily available from the beginning of the twentieth century, I quickly learned that there were many factors determining whether recordings were made or not.

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<sup>1</sup> I would particularly like to thank Xiao Mei and Gisa Jähnichen for involving me in the workshop. In preparing this paper for publication, I thank Gisa again and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. I also very much appreciate the ongoing support I receive from the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and the Australian National University.

<sup>2</sup> Although originally focussed on just music, the Music Archive has gradually expanded to include materials on dance as well.

<sup>3</sup> I wish to acknowledge Gordon Spearritt for encouraging and stimulating my efforts to locate early recordings of Papua New Guinea music. His initial work on the wealth of materials to be found in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv and our subsequent collaboration utilising them (Spearritt and Niles 1983) were essential to revealing to me some of the treasures to be found and the excitement of such research. I have maintained a frequently updated, yet incomplete, paper on such early recordings for the past few decades (Niles n.d.).

The first ethnographic sound recordings made in what is today Papua New Guinea resulted from the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait.<sup>4</sup> In 1898, Alfred Haddon and other researchers from Cambridge took a break from their research on the islands of the Torres Strait (between Australia and the island of New Guinea) and visited parts of what was then the colony of British New Guinea to the north. They brought along their phonograph and recorded a number of wax cylinders.

These 1898 recordings are the earliest made in Papua New Guinea.<sup>5</sup> While these were made by British researchers, this was atypical of most of the other early recordings of the country.

After these first recordings, the vast majority of other early recordings from Papua New Guinea were made by German visitors. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a portable machine for the recording of sound (the phonograph) and the media for doing so (wax cylinders) were quite widely available. These technical advances plus the establishment of the Phonogramm-Archiv in Berlin in 1901 proved to be of great importance for the early recording of music in Papua New Guinea and many other parts of the world.

At this time, the northern part of Papua New Guinea was a German colony. The enthusiastic staff at the Phonogramm-Archiv, particularly Erich von Hornbostel, made sure that many expeditions to German New Guinea were equipped with a phonograph and wax cylinders.<sup>6</sup>

Unsurprisingly, many of the early recordings from Papua New Guinea now housed in Berlin were made by these German expeditions, such as recordings made by Adolf Roesicke on the Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss Expedition (Sepik River Expedition), 1912–13 (e.g., Hiery 2001:Abb. 7; Kelm 2003:Abb. 16; Ziegler 2006:161, Abb. 40).

But as sound archives were quite rare at this point in time, the Phonogramm-Archiv in Berlin sponsored or attracted collections of cylinders made by non-German researchers as well, such as those made by Swedish researcher Gunnar Landtmann, 1910–11.

While German researchers certainly made most of the early recordings in Papua New Guinea, but after the end of World War I (1918), Germany lost its colonies in the New Guinea area. This meant a drastic reduction in German activity there; only slowly did researchers from other countries begin to show interest. For example, Australian Frank Hurley made cylinder recordings in the 1920s (Hurley 1924:photo following p. 172). Some of Hurley's recordings were transcribed and arranged for piano (Hurley 1921). While few of his original cylinders appear to have survived, the sheet music certainly does. (We wish it were the other way around!) But we keep hoping that the original recordings will someday appear.

In trying to track down early recordings, photographs can often reveal recording activity, but the research must also be done carefully. For example, a wonderful photo from 1933–34 shows people in the Hagen area *listening* to a phonograph (Leahy 1967:26; Connolly and Anderson 1987:229; Leahy 1994:dustcover, ii–iii, 218). But the machine portrayed could only playback previously recorded discs; as a result, no sound recordings were made on this first major expedition into the populous central mountain ranges of Papua New Guinea.

The technology for the recording of early recordings also changed over the years. Although most of the early recordings from Papua New Guinea were acoustically made on wax cylinders, by 1937 recordings began to be made on aluminium discs and with a separately powered microphone, such as during the Crane–Peabody Museum New Guinea Expedition of 1937 (Niles 2005; 2012:147–52).

This early recording from Papua New Guinea can perhaps best be illustrated on maps. I divide this recording of Papua New Guinea sound<sup>7</sup> into three periods, based on a variety of historical factors.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Recordings from this expedition are also the first made in Australia and the first made by British researchers. That the expedition also included recordings from Papua New Guinea was only clarified through the research of Alice Moyle (1983).

<sup>5</sup> Although the nation of Papua New Guinea only became independent in 1975 and parts of it had a variety of other names before then, for the sake of simplicity I will mostly use the term “Papua New Guinea” here, despite its historical inaccuracy for many of the periods discussed.

<sup>6</sup> For essential information about the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv and its cylinder collections, see particularly Ziegler (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Mostly music, but occasionally spoken materials as well.

<sup>8</sup> The original versions of these three maps were published elsewhere (Niles 2002:191–93, fig. 1–3). They have been revised and updated to complement discussion here.

In examining these maps, please note that each collection is identified by a dot—roughly varying in size to represent the number of recordings contained in it—plus the name of the collector(s) and the last two digits of the year of recording. Collection names in green are housed in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv; those in black are located elsewhere; those in red are also housed elsewhere, but were recorded outside of Papua New Guinea. This latter case includes examples of Papua New Guineans being recorded overseas, as well as of expatriates performing songs or speaking texts in local languages overseas. Obviously these maps are only meant to give a general idea of recording activity.

Figure 1 shows the period from when the first recordings were made (1898), up until 1904. During this time, recordings were an accomplishment of the British made, not surprisingly, in what was then British New Guinea.



FIGURE 1: Recording activity in Papua New Guinea, 1898–1904. [Recording on the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait (1898)].

As shown in figure 2, 1904 is also the beginning of the shift to recordings made by researchers from German-speaking countries: Austria and, slightly later and ultimately most significantly, Germany itself. In the case of the latter, the importance of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv in sponsoring and promoting much of this activity is very apparent—just look at all the green identifications on the map showing recordings housed in Berlin. Notice also the general predominance of work being undertaken in the northern part of the country in what was then German New Guinea.

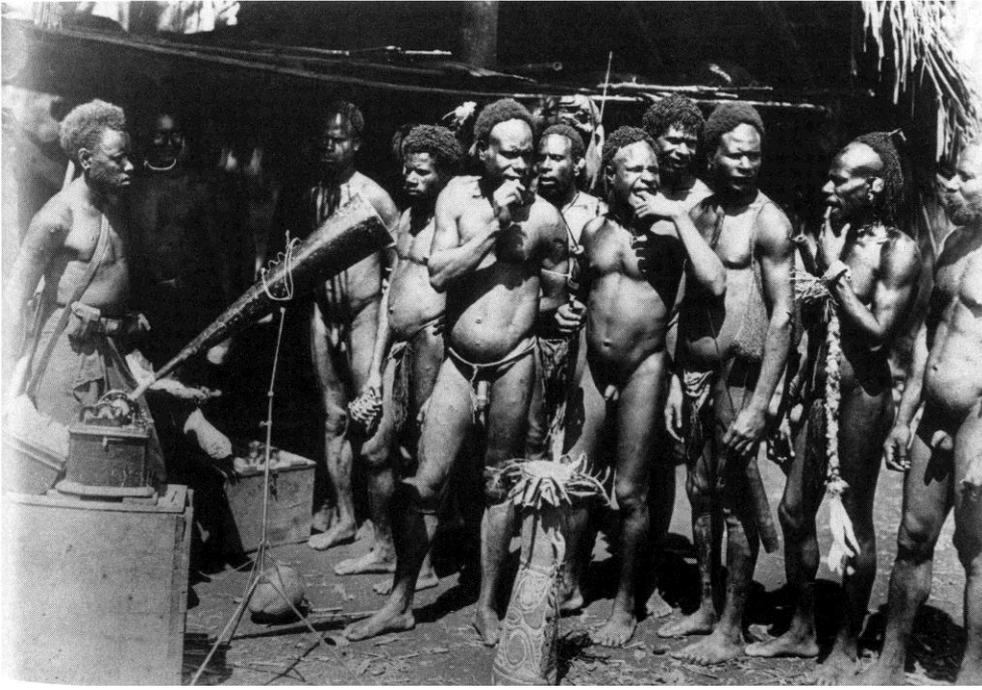


FIGURE 2: Recording activity in Papua New Guinea, 1904–1918. [German researcher Adolf Roesicke, Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluß Expedition, 1912–13].

Finally, as shown in figure 3, after World War I, Germany lost its colonies. In Papua New Guinea, Australia took over responsibility for the whole area. But Australian interests were different from those of their colonial predecessors; particularly it seems in relation to research.

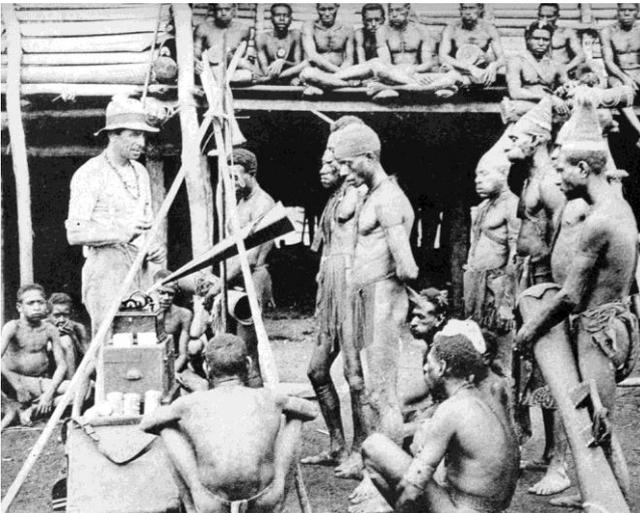


FIGURE 3: Recording activity in Papua New Guinea, 1921–1944. [Australian Frank Hurley recording in the Gogodala area, Aramia village, 1922–23].

Until the end of World War II—when technological advances increasingly brought recording technology into the hands of individuals, instead of mostly being bound to government institutions or government-sponsored research trips—recording activity was present, but never of the same intensity as shown at the beginning of the century.

Discovering what recordings were made, by whom, in what location, and where they might presently be located is a fascinating research project in itself and really requires considerable detective work. This can be greatly aided today by Internet resources, but still requires a lot of digging through scores of documents, some in the languages of the visitors. Of course, early writings give some indication as to what was done and contacting the main archives is an obvious way to being. But we have also located early Papua New Guinea recordings in other parts of Germany, as well as in the United Kingdom, Finland, Hungary, France, the United States, and Australia. I'm sure there are all sorts of possibilities for each country's cultural heritage in sound.

But what are “early” recordings in the Papua New Guinea context? While my original maps of recording activity ended with World War II, our definition of “early” recordings of Papua New Guinea music certainly extends beyond that time. Although Anthony Seeger suggested in the course of this workshop that “early” could well include anything recorded before “today,” our definition is still not quite as liberal. Presently, I suppose it would encompass anything recorded before the establishment of the Institute in 1974.

This would include quite a range of technologies. For example, radio journalists made wire recordings in 1949, ultimately resulting in one of the first commercial recordings of Papua New Guinea music (Simpson and Cunningham 1950). And by the mid-1950s, tape recorders were being used by many researchers of different nationalities and with different interests. To mention just a few: in 1949–56, Swiss ethnologist Paul Wirz and his son, Dadi Wirz, using a Nagra I recorder (Niles 2012:152–54); in 1952–57, US priest/anthropologist Fr. Louis J. Luzbetak (Niles 2011:45–46); in 1953–54, US anthropologist Theodore Schwartz in collaboration with Margaret Mead (Niles 1980:1); in 1955, US ballerina and dance researcher Beth Dean and her husband, Victor Carell (Dean and Carell 1958:142; Niles 2012:154–56); and in 1958, German anthropologist Hans Fischer using a Butoba recorder (Simon and Wegner 2000:6, 146). The introduction of tape certainly made recording in Papua New Guinea a much more commonplace activity, undertaken by an even greater international audience.

Recordings from the period following World War II are probably the ones that need to be focussed on now for the purposes of archiving. I would imagine that few collections of Papua New Guinea cylinders, early instantaneous discs, or wire recordings have not found their way to archives by now. But certainly many early collections on reel-to-reel tape remain with collectors or their descendants. With the approaching obsolescence of this medium and the machines to play it, digitisation of such tapes has now become critical.

But locating the recordings, regardless of how “early” is defined, is only the first of my three-part process.

## Get

After identifying early recordings and their present-day location, they need to be brought home. For my discussion, “home” is Papua New Guinea, specifically the archive at my institute (figure 4). Where possible this also includes repatriation to a village or region, but most often it is national repatriation. For a variety of reasons, it is often more difficult to return early recordings to villages. We are constantly trying to overcome this problem, but for the moment it remains.



FIGURE 4: Outside of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.

Luckily, of course, repatriating recordings does not mean the return of the original recordings (if they continue to exist at all). We certainly do not have the equipment to play cylinders or discs recorded at nonstandard speeds. Rather, we want *copies* of those recordings on whatever medium is appropriate: reels, cassettes, DATs, CDs, or as digitised sound files. In many cases we seek financial assistance from embassies

and high commissions for such work. Almost invariably we get what we ask for—not vast amounts of money, but just enough to copy the recordings and notes, and ship them to us. Such activities are generally seen as very good things, beneficial to both the donor and recipient archives and countries.

If the collections returned were substantial, we hold events at our institute, inviting ambassadors, our minister for culture, other VIPs, the media, and supporters. For example, newspaper articles about the repatriation of recordings from Berlin being presented to us by the German ambassador in 1987, where produced by the local media and also resulted from our own press release on the event (e.g., see Niles 2012:148, figure 3).

Materials received are then added to our Music Archive at the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, which was established in 1974, one year before independence. Master recordings are kept in a temperature- and humidity-controlled, insulated shipping container: not luxurious but functional and quite secure (figure 5).



FIGURE 5: Music Archivist Gedisa Jacob outside shipping container that serves as storage for master recordings.

We have about 12,000 master recordings in our collection (figure 6). This includes repatriated recordings, plus those made by staff, overseas researchers, commercial recordings, and a few radio programmes. We aim to make the archive as representative as possible of all types of Papua New Guinea music; therefore, it includes traditional, popular, and church music, as well as that performed by brass bands and bagpipe bands of the disciplined forces.



FIGURE 6: Music Archivist Gedisa Jacob with master recordings.

Everything is catalogued in our on-site database, but nothing is accessible through the Internet. Our technician maintains the recordings in our archive. He received training on digitisation techniques at the University of Auckland, New Zealand—a rare programme that combined such training along with a donation of digitising equipment (Moriguba 2010).

## Use

As the early recordings have now been returned to Papua New Guinea, perhaps one could say that the repatriation is complete, but we feel there is another essential step in this process: using these recordings. I mean “use” in very broad terms because the aim is to make people know about these recordings and what they mean to people today. This can be accomplished in newspaper articles, radio and TV interviews, academic papers, commercial recordings, and so forth.

One of our own efforts to make early recordings more accessible concerns three important collections of early Papua New Guinea recordings housed at the first sound archive in the world, the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna.<sup>9</sup> One of these collections was made by a Dutch Catholic priest (Josef Winthuis) in 1908–9. Another was made of Boniface (Tamatai) Pritak-Mawi, a teenage Papua New Guinean brought to Vienna by priests in 1907 and recorded there under the direction of Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt—these latter recordings were the first overseas recordings of a Papua New Guinean.

The most extensive and well-known collection, however, was made by Austrian ethnologist Rudolf Pöch during his travels to what was then German and British New Guinea, 1904–6.

I was responsible for documenting the recordings by translating, editing, and annotating any existing notes of the original collectors and supplementing this information wherever possible. The result was a set of six CDs plus a 223-page booklet of translated notes, background information, bibliography, and music transcriptions

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<sup>9</sup> I follow the convention adopted by other scholars (e.g., articles in Berlin and Simon 2002) of writing the name of the Berlin archive as “Phonogramm-Archiv” and the Viennese one as “Phonogrammarchiv,” although there has always been considerable variation in spellings, even in publications from these archives.

(Niles 2000). This work also enabled us to provide further documentation on the recordings that we had received—a very important part of the collaborations we have developed with archives. We are very fortunate indeed that the staff of the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv were so generously supportive of this work to allow such a complete publication (figure 7).

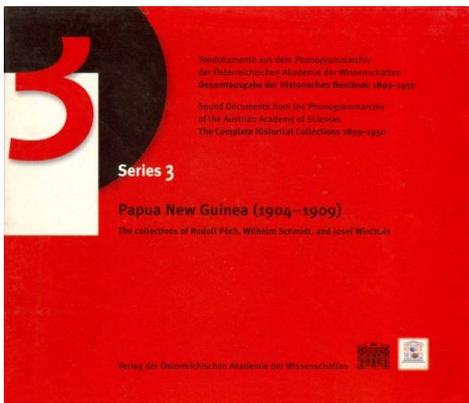


FIGURE 7: Publication in 2000 of early recordings of Papua New Guinea music from the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv.

My Institute has also used our archival recordings in a publication called the *Papua New Guinea Music Collection* (Niles and Webb 1987). This consists of eleven cassettes of over 300 examples of music from many parts of Papua New Guinea, accompanied by a book of documentation (figure 8). It was compiled in collaboration with a lecturer at Goroka Teachers College (presently, University of Goroka) to meet the demands of teachers in Papua New Guinea who lacked materials about Papua New Guinea music to use in the classroom. While focussing primarily on more recent recordings, some early examples are also included to indicate the historical depth of sound recordings to students.

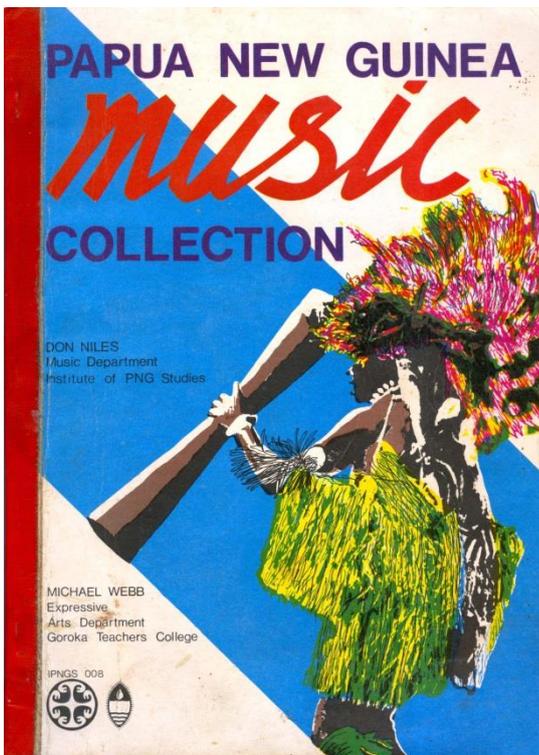


FIGURE 8: Book cover of the *Papua New Guinea Music Collection* by Don Niles and Michael Webb (1987).

Of course, repatriation is not just limited to our own efforts. As another example, ethnomusicologist Kirsty Gillespie included some century-old examples from the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv on a CD of music from the Lihir Islands, in New Ireland Province. As part of her project, these recordings were played to stimulate new performances (Gillespie 2008; 2017).

It is likely that such archival materials will add dimensions to research already being undertaken.

## Conclusions

In summary, I see three steps in repatriation:

1. **Find:** who did what, when, where, present location, etc.
2. **Get:** arrange for copies to be made, traded, bought, etc., so that these can be returned home, wherever that may be
3. **Use:** publicise these early recordings, get people to work with them, return information to source archive and communities, etc.

I hope by sharing our experiences in repatriation readers will gain some understanding of how we have approached the subject and the great importance such recordings have for the people of Papua New Guinea.

Early recordings might reconfirm or conflict with notions of performance today, represent now-forgotten or vaguely remembered genres, or stimulate discussion on aspects of present-day practice. They are vital elements in our cultural heritage. I very much hope that the search for early recordings, followed by their acquisition and multiple uses will be as exciting for others as have such activities continued to be for us.

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