

## Overview of the ARC and The Muslim Music Crash Course (MMCC)

B. George, *ARChive of Contemporary Music, New York, USA*

This paper touches on three topics: What the ARC is and how we built it; our recent alliances with Columbia University, the National Library of Singapore and Gracenote; and our first global cataloging project that will focus on recordings from the greater Islamic world.

### What is the ARC?

The Archive of Contemporary Music is now in its 24th year of operation and now includes well over two million recordings. ARC collects two copies of every version of all commercial releases. We do not digitize or migrate material. Popular music for us is anything that is not classical era western art music, meaning we do not collect material composed from the Revolutionary to the Civil War. Technically we begin the collection with the advent of microgroove recordings in the 1940s, coinciding with the invention of the teenager and the introduction of the 33rpm 12" LP and 45rpm 7" single.

ARC began in 1985 when I could not find an institution willing to accept my personal collection of nearly 50,000 discs. This was mostly punk, hip-hop and reggae material. At the time, we were told, by every institution we approached, that this ISN'T music worth saving.

I had accumulated this material as a radio and club DJ. I released Laurie Anderson's first single, 'O Superman', on my own small label, One Ten Records — this became a #2 hit in the UK — and had co-directed Laurie's stage show for 6 years. In the early 1980s I had also authored *Volume, The international Discography of the New Wave* (Omnibus Pr, 1983), a 700-page book that was the first comprehensive look at this material.

So, with some like-minded friends I recruited a Board of well-known musicians, secured initial funding, got donations from record companies and private collectors, letters of support from the heads of all the major record companies (when there were such things), and began the ARC in a small loft in lower Manhattan.


Currently ARC occupies 15,000 square feet of space in 3 locations and houses over 1/2 million LPs, 300,000 CDs, 750,000 twelve inch dance and club singles, 350,000 seven inch singles, several thousand paper records and flexidiscs, and nearly 3 million press kits, posters and photos. We don't collect 78s, but, accidentally, have about 15,000. We have cataloged more than half of the CDs, a third of the LPs, and nearly all of the seven inch singles. There are also 25,000 music books, 60,000 videos and over 100,000 music magazines.

We catalog using off the shelf software, but have designed it so that it can easily flow into MARC, or any other Sputnik era cataloging system, if needs be. Somewhat unique to our library is that the cataloging is not only on the song level, but now 15% of catalogued recordings include information on publishers, authors and rights organizations. Few libraries or archives do this.

More unique perhaps, is that ARC has done all this without any government or institutional support or grants of any kind. We've managed to survive through:

- membership
- research fees
- our semi-annual sales where we get rid of third copies
- the generous donations of our individuals and our Boards.

Our high profile Board of Advisors is made up of musicians and entertainment industry people we admired — a key element in ARC's survival. It began with legendary producer John Hammond. Our current Board includes some really great people — songwriters Leiber and Stoller; film directors Jonathan Demme and Martin Scorsese; artists/producers Jellybean Benitez and Nile Rodgers; and performing artists David Bowie, Youssou N'Dour, Lou Reed,



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Keith Richards, Todd Rundgren, Fred Schneider and Paul Simon. Sadly in the past months two members, Jerry Wexler and Ellie Greenwich have died. New board people will be announced soon, and we hope to add an entire band to the list of supporters for the first time.<sup>102</sup>

Beyond funding, the Board's members generate publicity and help build our collections. They assist in creating "special collections" based on their interests. To date the most developed is the Keith Richards Blues Collection numbering some 10,000 recordings. It was Keith who purchased a rare Robert Johnson 78 for the ARC, "Me and The Devil Blues", one of only 10 known copies. We are also working on a Haitian collection with Jonathan Demme.

All materials are donated and we have no acquisitions budget. Our approach is very personal, and we have sought out and developed ongoing relationships within the music industry and with collectors. We can't emphasize enough how our accessibility has led to our growth. If someone calls we pick up the phone and talk to them.

Beyond cataloging, the most common day-to-day activity at the ARC is research for the music industry. Mostly we track down publishing information, reconstruct unavailable audio, provide fact-checking, consult on films and provide scans of record covers. Thousands of high resolution scans of covers are provided annually to record labels for reissue projects and to magazines, aggregators and book publishers for illustrations. ARC provided scans for the opening exhibit at the Jazz Hall of Fame at the AOL Time Warner Building in conjunction with the Lincoln Center, and provided over 1000 scans for the new Grammy Hall of Fame in Los Angeles.

### **Partnership with Columbia University**

After 20 years of building the collection, three years ago I began seeking partnerships that would make the collection available to more users. It made no sense to have such a large collection and allow such limited access. The result is a partnership with Columbia University to enrich and enhance course study, to integrate our resources into arts programming and other educational and scholarly activities.

One of the deciding factors for Columbia to take us on was the range and breadth of the ARC's collections and the support databases we have created. The deciding factor for us was the promise of stability and permanence that the University could provide.

With Columbia, ARC will post our online catalog beginning with ½ million recordings and inaugurate our first international project, the Muslim Music Crash Course (see below).

### **Expansion into new locations**

At the time we were speaking with Columbia, we also began talks with the National Library in Singapore about creating ARCCasia. We were originally approached to work on a rock music collection for their Libraries, but shifted the focus to the music of the region based on the incredible variety of ethnicities that make up this city-state. In this way we hope to create a world-class collection, mirrored in both locations, of music from South India, Madagascar, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea, Japan and the Philippines. Again, this is a project that has developed over many years, and is only possible because we were lucky enough to find good people, and the right people, in Singapore. These partners include the National Heritage Board, the National Arts Council, COMPASS (the Composers and Authors Association of Singapore), the National Archives of Singapore, and the National Library Board.

ARCCasia is scheduled to begin in mid-2010, and will be housed in the Performing Arts Library, called the Library @ Esplanade, a prime site situated on the bay. The existing library already features an exhibition space, a performing stage, practice and screening rooms, offices and materials storage areas.

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<sup>102</sup> Since the paper was delivered in Athens in 2009, ARC has added Michael Feinstein, a leading performer and advocate of the American Songbook, to our Board of Advisors.

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By placing an ARC in different locations we hope to collect music that would be impossible to obtain locally.

We are also seeking to create an ARCEu, and we think this is a possibility. While Singapore is primarily interested in digital material, the EU site will house all of our physical second copies. ARC's initial contribution to this second location will be a little under 100,000 discs.

### **Collaboration with Gracenote**

In order to make sense and use of all this material, ARC has created and maintains an important group of intellectual assets and databases. Partnering with Columbia will present some challenges as we integrate systems, but our primary concern is universal access, with web-available cataloging that works more like Amazon and Google, massive lists easily downloadable, while retaining the detail associated with high cataloging standards. Expertise and funding to create our online cataloging is being provided by Gracenote, the company that supplies the metadata for i-Tunes and hundreds of other companies marketing music playback devices.

Another important two-year project completed this year, and now up and running, is the New York Musicians Index and Archive, or NYMIA. This is a database of all musicians and music related businesses operating in New York State. This database now contains over 47,000 entries, with information on musicians, labels, aggregators, music publishers, managers, venues, distributors, retailers, instrument repairers and rights organizations. The most important aspect is that once a search is made, the most useful data — the business description and contact information — is available on the first page, avoiding a series of clicks or mis-directions. This allows users to make a phone call, visit the web site or send an e-mail from the front page. We are working hard with Gracenote to develop this one click/one page model for our online catalog database.


### **The Muslim Music Crash Course (MMCC) — target date 12 April 2011**

ARC is combining the resources of a large university, and a corporate sponsor, to launch our first major project, The Muslim Music Crash Course, or MMCC. This is a worldwide, one-day, two-part event, scheduled to take place on 12 April 2011. The first event is a live online attempt to identify and catalog as many recordings of Muslim music, from any and all sources, around the world, in one day. The second, is a series of live concerts to celebrate the diversity, beauty and cultural importance of Muslim music. In addition, Columbia University will host a seminar the day of the event, as will the Middle Eastern Research Center in Amman, Jordan.

This is a joint project of the ARC, the Middle Eastern Research Center in Amman, Jordan, the Arts Initiative at Columbia University, Columbia's Middle East and Islamic Study Center, the Columbia University Libraries, Gracenote, who is building the website and database, and the Internet Archive, who will supply the bandwidth. ARC's most recent Board member, Youssou N'dour, will act as spokesperson for the project and perform a live concert.

The "crash course" idea stems from the 'tech-ins' of the 1960s, where knowledgeable guides would help students better understand complex issues, through a series of focused discussions and encounters, all in one day. We envision 100 students, technicians and volunteers at their computers in one room, and 100,000 people online. ARC people will try to interpret the electronic 'datamess' that we expect — and make sure all the information can flow into a common pool.

Preplanning and promotion [which was the main purpose of B. George's presentation at the IASA conference in Athens] involves enlisting the services of major collections and collectors from around the world. The aim is to inspire them to search their collections, be it library, archive, closet or basement, to pull or catalog or tag relevant recordings. The project blog, at <http://arcmmcc.wordpress.com/>, lists a variety of suggestions for participation.



The goal of the MMCC is to grow ARC's collection of 2500 relevant recordings, let more people know and learn about the music, and create a permanent knowledge base with internet access — all to celebrate the diversity, beauty and cultural importance of Muslim music.

Using and testing the MMCC database will be our beta for launching the full online catalog of all of our holdings. This is The International Discography, or Internet Discography (iD) — a freely available reference site catalog of our two million sound recordings.<sup>103</sup>

## Conclusion

There is a wonderful short story by Emanuel Bound-zeki Dongala called “Jazz and Palm Wine”. In it, the earth is invaded from Outer Space and the advance ships land in Zaire [sic]. Aliens conquer the world. Spacemen explore the various cultures and societies on this planet and decide, quite rightly, that the only things of value are palm wine, a West African intoxicant, and Jazz. The tipsy, hip and benign rulers make Sun Ra the president of the United States and John Coltrane the Pope. “A Love Supreme” replaces the “Gloria” in the liturgy.

We view the past through the artifacts that survive, and future societies (even spacemen?) will reshape the past, creating their own version of our culture(s). So the ARChive collects and preserves everything that's issued, hoping to define 'what happened' in terms broader than those usually described by selectiveness or availability. Taste, quality, marketing, Halls of Fame, sales figures, stars and value are as alien to us as they are, well, to Aliens. The ARChive's job, all of our jobs, is to make sure “A Love Supreme” will be there when it's needed.

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<sup>103</sup> The economy has slowed down the Singapore opening, but the Gracenote projects, including mounting our catalog, are moving full speed ahead. The catalog should be up and searchable in June 2010. Visit the website for updates: [www.arcmusic.org](http://www.arcmusic.org)