

# FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

WINTER 1993 • VOLUME XV, NUMBER 1



American Folklife Center • The Library of Congress



The American Folklife Center was created in 1976 by the U.S. Congress to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, publication, and training. The Center incorporates the Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in the Music Division of the Library of Congress in 1928, and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world.

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Cover: Chocó Indians from the upper part of the Sambu River on the Panama-Colombia border, recorded for the Archive of Folk Culture in 1949 by Norwegian filmmaker Per Host. Archive of Folk Culture

#### EDITOR'S NOTES

##### The Oz of Archives

In 1941, a grant from the Carnegie Corporation made possible the establishment of a Recording Labora-

tory in the Library of Congress, thus allowing the Library "to provide for schools, libraries, and individuals, recordings of American folk music, American poetry read and interpreted by its makers, unpublished string quartets, new American music and other similar materials." In 1942, the Archive of Folk Culture issued its first albums of recorded folk music. The recordings were edited by Alan Lomax, then head of the Archive. Each album consisted of five 78-rpm records pressed in black shellac (the famous clear red vinyl was to come later). The albums patriotically mixed ten-inch and twelve-inch records--shellac was being rationed in 1942.

In describing the project for the Carnegie Corporation, Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish expressed the desire to make the materials in the Library's collections widely available: "It seems to me that we can either educate the American people as to the value of their cultural heritage and their national civilization, or sit and watch the destruction and disintegration of that culture and that civilization by forces now so ruinously active in this world."

A new venture with a similar impulse was launched on March 15, 1993, with a symposium and reception, and the story is told in three articles in this issue of *Folklife Center News*. The Endangered Music Project had its inception in 1990 when Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart visited the Library of Congress and began to investigate the recordings in the Archive of Folk Culture. As he explained, "I knew it was Alexandria and the Vatican Library all rolled into one, the Oz of archives—the ultimate wine cellar. I couldn't wait to get in there and start sampling the vintage."

Hart proposed a joint venture with the Center for a series of recordings from the Archive collections to be issued on the Rykodisc label, certain that there would be a wide audience for music that once would have been regarded as too exotic to appeal to popular taste. "There are enormous stockpiles of information in our repositories," he told Music Division interviewer Ann McLean. "Alan [Jabbour] is sitting on a gold mine here. And I believe it should be for the people, because

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## Opening Up the "Oz of Archives": Mickey Hart and the Endangered Music Project



Mickey Hart (center) at the Library of Congress on March 9, 1991, with Alan Jabbour (left) and Mike Donaldson (right), head studio engineer for the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. Hart visited the Library to work on the selection and digital mastering of rare field recordings from the rainforests of tropical Central and South America. His interest in traditional music from throughout the world led him to the Archive of Folk Culture, where he conceived the idea for a series of commercial releases that has become the Endangered Music Project.

By James McKee

"The isolation which had preserved their ancient customs was in the process of breaking down. It was the beginning of a development which contained the germ of a complete change in their mode of life."

Per Host, *What the World Showed Me*

In 1949 the Norwegian filmmaker Per Host journeyed into the

rainforests of Panama's Darién Province with conflicting feelings of hope and imminent loss. Host had heard tales of the Embera Chocó Indians of the upper Sambú River Valley, mountain dwellers who had hidden themselves from the outside world since a smallpox epidemic in the 1920s wiped out a large part of their population.

His hopes of filming a sequestered forest society were mixed with fears that the completion of the Pan-

American Highway would herald an invasion of industrial and trade interests into the region, setting in motion the machinery of irrevocable change.

After making his way to the secluded mountain valleys of the Chocó, Host shot more than ten thousand feet of film and recorded a number of songs on magnetic tape, including a spellbinding fever-curing chant sung by a renowned shaman named Gajego.

One year later, when Host returned to Darién to shoot additional footage, his fears were confirmed: the Panamanian government had granted a large concession to a timber company to extract mahogany from the region, and soldiers had been dispatched to put down any possible resistance. Many of his Chocó friends had succumbed to tuberculosis brought to their village by Christian missionaries. Gajego's traditional medicine, so effective against spirit-caused afflictions, was no match for the diseases brought by the foreigners. Death usually came within a few weeks.

Per Host probably never thought that his field recordings, safely stored in the Library of Congress's Archive of Folk Culture, would be heard by a worldwide audience. But for the past three years his work, and that of four other collectors and several dozen performers, has been the focus of the Endangered Music Project, a public-private cooperative venture between the American Folklife Center and 360° Productions, the California-based production company of Mickey Hart, percussionist for the rock group the Grateful Dead. The purpose of the project is to select Archive field recordings of cultural traditions that are threatened or under stress, digitally remaster them using state-of-the-art sound processing equipment, and release them on compact disc. Proceeds from the project will help support the performers on the disc and their communities, and will help produce future releases.

The first title in the Endangered Music Series, *The Spirit Cries: Music from the Rainforests of South America and the Caribbean* (Rykodisc CD 10250), was released on March 15, 1993, in conjunction with a Folklife Center symposium at the Library entitled "Music and Cultural Conservation." Symposium participants included Mickey Hart, Center director Alan Jabbour, Aluku Maroon musicians Aleïna Apalobi and Sephiro Maïs, filmmaker Diane Kitchen (who showed *Roots and Thorns*, her new film on the Asháninka of Peru), ethnomusicologists Kenneth Bilby, Steven Feld, James McKee, and Thomas Vennum, and Jason Clay, director of Cultural Survival Enterprises. Discussion focused on such topics as the relationship between destruction

of ecosystems and the loss of cultural diversity, and strategies for preserving the oral traditions of culturally threatened peoples.

An evening reception celebrating the release of *The Spirit Cries* was hosted by Librarian of Congress James H. Billington in the Library's Great Hall. Guests included Grateful Dead members Jerry Garcia, Mickey Hart, and Bob Weir; Don Rose, president of Rykodisc; Sen. Patrick Leahy; and congressional representatives Neil Abercrombie, Anthony Beilenson, Sherrod Brown, Vic Fazio, Joe Knollenberg, Jerry Lewis, Norman Mineta, Jim Moran, Lewis Payne, Robert Underwood, and Tom Lantos.

Coproduced by Hart and Jabbour, *The Spirit Cries* contains music from six collections recorded between 1949 and 1987. Some of the disc's highlights are:

From the Per Host Panama/Chocó Indian Collection (1949), an Emberá healing ritual performed by the shaman Gajego, who shakes a palm frond over a man to drive feverish spirits from his body;

From the David Findlay Suriname Wayana Collection (1952), a pair of

Wayana songs recorded in an office of the Dutch Consulate in Paramaribo, during an impromptu session;

From the Enrique Pinilla Folk and Indian Music of Peru Collection (1963-64), songs of the Asháninka Indians, featuring their striking imitative polyphony;

From the Kenneth Bilby Jamaican Maroon Collection (1977-78), two possession-trance dances from the *Kromanti Play*, one of the most purely African of the Caribbean musical-ritual complexes;

From the Carol and Travis Jenkins Garífuna Collection (Belize, 1981), a variety of religious and dance musics, including the bawdy social commentary of the *punta* dance and the strikingly beautiful *abaimahani* and *arumahani* songs, created while the composer is dreaming or in a trance; and

From the Kenneth Bilby Aluku Maroon Collection (French Guiana and Suriname, 1981-84), ritual and social-dance drumming, popular music, and solo game-songs accompanied by the *agwado*, a three-stringed bow unique in the New World.



Chocó traditional healer Gajego recording a fever curing chant for Per Host, Darién rainforest, Panama, 1947. Archive of Folk Culture



Wayana Indians photographed on a visit to the Dutch Consulate, Paramaribo, Suriname, 1952. Photo by David Findlay

What is endangered music? To most people, the term endangered brings to mind images of tamarins, tree sloths, or undiscovered miracle plants in danger of perishing as 32 million acres of rainforest disappear worldwide each year. In Central and South America, however, uncontrolled deforestation has also had devastating effects upon cultural groups whose lives are traditionally tied to the rainforest. In the past several decades, tropical forest cultures of the Americas have seen game resources depleted, lost vast tracts of land to expanding agriculture, and witnessed the demise of hundreds of plant species used in healing and ritual. To many of these peoples, losing the forest is synonymous with losing a primary source of spiritual power.

To view tropical forest cultures as threatened only in an environmental sense is to ignore the array of twentieth-century social, economic, and political forces that have conspired against them as well. Government colonization programs, tourism, drug trafficking, guerrilla warfare, Western political structures and educational systems, missionary initiatives, and mass media have hastened the decline of indigenous languages, the loss of social and political autonomy, and the dwindling of skilled

practitioners of cultural traditions such as music and dance.

Each of the groups featured on *The Spirit Cries* has been threatened in recent decades. The Emberá and Wounan Chocó—who have fared better than most Indian groups because of Panama's efforts to establish semi-autonomous geopolitical units (*comarcas*)—are threatened by rapid deforestation to clear land for cattle ranches. The Asháninka have been forced from their homelands as a result of Peru's campaign to resettle Andean peoples in the eastern forests, initiatives for industrialized agriculture, and conflicts with the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. The Jamaican Maroons of Moore Town have seen the decline of the *Kromanti Play* because of missionary proselytization, and rapid development of Jamaica's North Coast threatens the remaining forest in the Blue Mountain region. Because of the stagnation in local economies, the Garífuna have increasingly abandoned their traditional beachside settlements to seek employment in the cities of Belize, Honduras, and the United States; those who remain are isolated from their kin abroad. The imposition of French-style local governments has marginalized the Aluku Maroons and Wayana communities of French Guiana.

Anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Kenneth Bilby, who recorded two collections featured on the disc, contends that cultural assimilation is often a prelude to ecological disaster:

When people are rapidly deprived of the cultural understandings and modes of expression that give meaning to their lives, their capacity to resist domination and guide the direction of future change is gravely impaired. The social and cultural fragmentation that results opens the way for opportunistic commercial exploitation from outside, thus hastening ecological destruction.

While the Grateful Dead has promoted environmental causes through benefit concerts and activist spokespersonship over the past two-and-a-half decades, drummer Mickey Hart has quietly developed his own brand of musical conservation. Hart's CD series *The World*—which comprises more than seventeen releases ranging from collaborations with Airto Moreira and Phillip Glass to the soundtrack for *Apocalypse Now*—provides a popular forum for musical traditions that may be considered endangered. For example, the songs of the Sudanese *oud* master Hamza El-Din, heard on the album *Eclipse* and the Nubian music featured on *Music of Upper and Lower Egypt* document the cultural disruption that followed the completion of the Aswan High Dam. The Gyuto monks of Nepal, heard on the album *Freedom Chants from the Roof of the World*, were forced to flee Tibet after many of their brothers were killed or jailed by the communist Chinese.

Hart's twin commitments to musical and human rights and his near-legendary pursuit of audio perfection find their most rarified expression in *Voices of the Rainforest*, an astounding soundscape of music and daily life among the Kaluli people of the Bosavi Rainforest, Papua New Guinea. The Kaluli, who in the last twenty years have experienced profound social changes as a result of oil exploration, intensive logging, and an ever-expanding network of roads, have also experienced the disastrous effects of these developments upon their musical and ritual life. Hart arranged a six-week trip to Bosavi for Steven Feld, the Western Hemisphere's foremost authority on Kaluli

music. Feld recorded music, bird calls, and insect noises, exploring different height zones of the forest canopy. Hart then spent more than four months in the studio mixing the component tracks to re-create the spatialized "up-over-lifting-sound" aesthetic central to Kaluli musical life.

**H**art's collaboration with the Library of Congress began in 1989, when he made a visit to the American Folklife Center looking for photographs to illustrate *Planet Drum*. Over the course of several meetings, he and Jabbour began planning a disc featuring collections from the Archive. As Hart said, "I knew that you were holding these tapes, and it's always been my dream to open up these vaults, these archives and bring them into the private sector. . . . we had a couple of meetings and we formed this alliance, and now it's coming to fruition."

*The Spirit Cries* took time and painstaking effort to prepare for release. During the summer of 1990, prompted by Mickey Hart's initial inquiry, the American Folklife Center secured Kenneth Bilby as a consultant to identify collections in the Archive with rainforest-related recordings from the tropical Americas. He identified eight Archive collections with rainforest recordings comprising more than ninety hours of music.

Next, I joined the project to make reference copies of the "study collection" and to develop a narrowed-down selection to facilitate intensive listening. I selected eight hours of music strong enough to warrant further consideration. While keeping in mind the need to provide a representative picture of each collection, my goal was to assess each collection's strong points and choose the selections which best represented those strengths. My selection criteria were different for each collection. There was so much good material that much of it was necessarily left on the original reels.

Copies of the eight hours of audition tapes were given to Mickey Hart, who made the second cut:

My selection process was mostly earplay. . . . I didn't want it to be an ethnography specifically of the area, I wanted it to be a popular

work. I would listen to them over and over . . . in different environments, on the beach, in the house, in the car . . . . I would listen in the morning, the afternoon, and the evening, and the selection revealed itself to me.

Hart made his final selection in January 1991 while on the Hawaiian islands, in the Kona region. Known by the project team as the "Kona Edit," these thirty-seven pieces from six collections were the foundation of *The Spirit Cries*.

Although most of the original recordings were made on then state-of-the-art equipment, their sound quality does not match today's audio standards. Hart's next step was to digitize, remix, and remaster the Kona Edit. Engineer Mike Donaldson from the Library's Recording Laboratory transferred the recordings from Library preservation tapes to digital audio tape (DAT), supervised by Hart and Jabbour during Hart's March 1991 visit to the Library. The DAT master was then sent to Hart's studio in northern California, where Hart and his longtime engineers Tom Flye and Jeff Sterling began the restoration process.

Flye's goal was to create "a new environment for each piece to live in," and each piece presented unique problems requiring a unique restoration strategy. All the recordings were "bathed" with Sonic Solutions, a computerized noise-reduction system that removes tape hiss, microphone bumps, and other disturbances. Some of the tracks were treated with electronic reverberation; on others, an ambient effect was created by re-recording the music as it played through a pair of large loudspeakers positioned in a meadow behind Hart's studio. Hart compares the restoration work to that done on Old Masters, and stresses that his aim was to allow the luster of the original to shine through: "It's sort of like the Sistine Chapel—you can only go so far before you hit the paint. We [drew] back before we took away the original intent of the music."

Meanwhile, Ken Bilby and I were busy writing the liner notes. The fax machines were rarely silent as drafts bounced back and forth between the East and West Coasts with Jabbour, Hart, editor Caryl Ohrbach, and production manager Howard Cohen

making suggestions and revisions. It was also my job to look for photographs. At the Smithsonian's Human Studies Film Archives, I discovered documentation of the Asháninka of Peru, collected by filmmaker Diane Kitchen for her documentary of Asháninka life, *Before We Knew Nothing*. Thumbing through the file, I found more than twenty four-by-five black-and-white Asháninka portraits, daily scenes, and a shot of canoeists set in stark relief against the shimmering surface of the Tambo River and dwarfed by the intricate chiaroscuro of the rainforest rising behind them. I immediately knew that this was our cover photograph. Kitchen, a professor of film at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, readily agreed to let us use the photograph and a portrait of two men playing panpipes.

**F**or many listeners the eclecticism of *The Spirit Cries* will shatter monolithic notions of what rainforest music should sound like. African-influenced drumming, call-and-response singing, and chordophone traditions are interspersed with Amerindian-influenced monophonic chants, two-part polyphony, and Western-influenced popular music. The powerful syncretism of Garífuna music, the product of a now-coastal group of African slave descendants who absorbed Amerindian and Hispanic elements as they made the transition from an island/rainforest culture to a mainland beach culture, perhaps best illustrates the adaptability, tenacity, and dynamism that characterizes these rainforest cultures as a whole. As Jabbour observed:

What we see here is rainforest communities that have encountered African-American imports, runaway slaves and freedmen who found their own life in the rainforest; therefore, you find in the rainforest not solitude and sequester but creative interchange, and this CD captures the energy and magic of that interchange.

Notwithstanding the wide range of musical styles and the broad geographical, cultural, and historical dif-

ferences among the groups, *The Spirit Cries* displays a thematic coherence. One common thread is the transformational function of the music, which accompanies a variety of life-cycle activities such as birth, initiation, and death, as well as healing and divination, often in combination with rainforest plants and associated elemental spirits. For Hart, these liminal experiences and the unity of inspiration and action imbue the music with an elusive quality that takes priority over the mechanics of performance:

There are two ways of looking at music. There's a technical way, which has nothing to do with the spiritual, and then there's a spiritual way, which has nothing to do with technique. The spiritual way you tune yourself into this music when you are making it has nothing to do with technique, it has to do with the transformational moment. It has to do with creation, not re-creation. These are individual moments . . . never to be repeated. Of course, technique doesn't hurt, but it's not

necessarily the prime ingredient for this kind of music.

We are now distributing copies of *The Spirit Cries* among the communities in which they were recorded. Cassettes and CDs were given to Aluku musicians Sephiro Maïs and Aleïna Apalobi on their return to French Guiana, where they will give them to friends and fellow musicians. Radio airplay among the Aluku is also assured: one CD copy of *The Spirit Cries* has found its way to TRM, a low-wattage radio/TV station located on the Lawa river in the heart of Aluku territory. In Jamaica, Kenneth Bilby has delivered copies to the Maroon musicians of Moore Town and to Jamaican radio stations. We are now making plans to send copies of *The Spirit Cries* to Belize, Panama, Peru, and Suriname; and Mickey Hart and Folklife Center staff are already discussing the next release in the series.

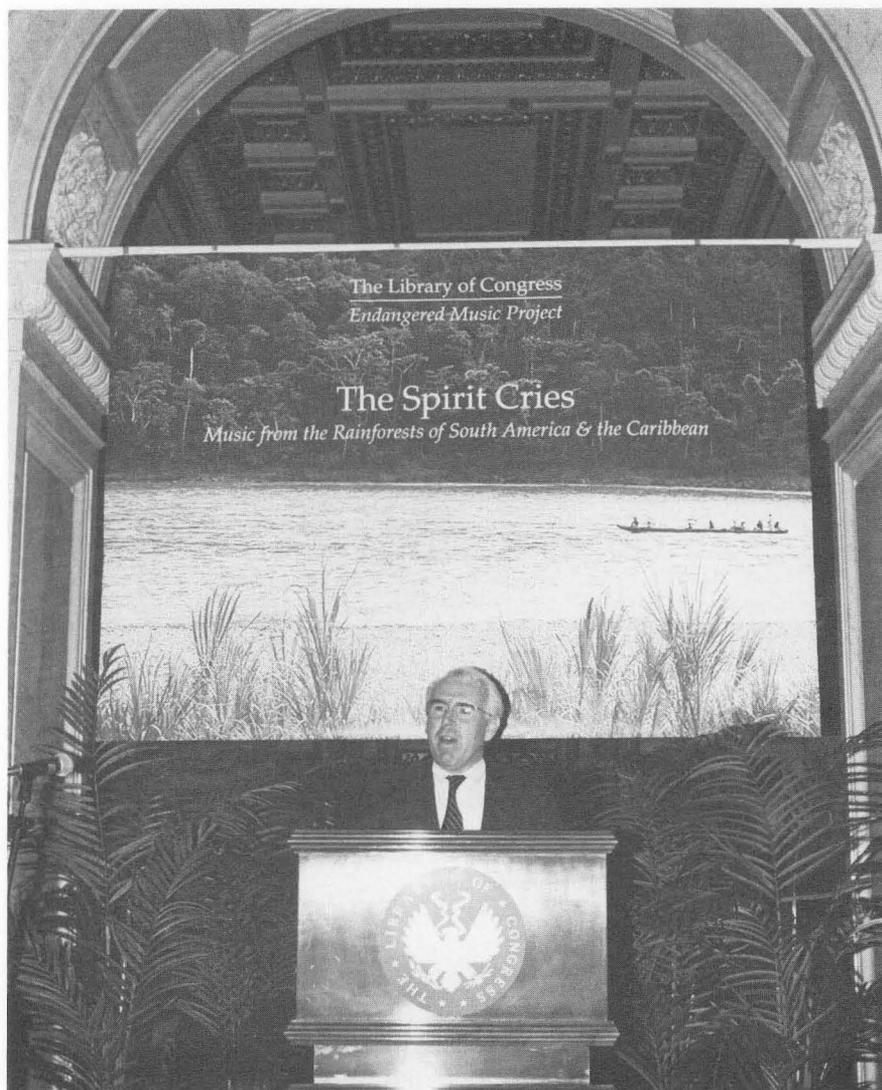
The Endangered Music Project deals in amplification (by using the same technologies that sometimes threaten these musics to make them more widely accessible), reflexivity (by providing cultural groups with the means to examine their distant and recent pasts), and legitimization (by giving oral traditions the status in their communities that flows from recognition by national institutions and contemporary media). By restoring and repatriating these musics, and by rewarding the performers for their efforts, the Endangered Music Project seeks to provide traditional peoples of the world, threatened by ecological and cultural compromise, with a newly restored glimpse of their collective pasts to carry into the next century.

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James McKee is an ethnomusicologist who assisted in the production of *The Spirit Cries for the American Folklife Center's Endangered Music Project*.



Rep. Vic Fazio speaking about the work of the Folklife Center at the March 15 reception in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress: "It's really hard to imagine yourself in the canopy of the rainforest when you're under this sort of canopy, but I think the Folklife Center really does for all of us what our imagination can't always do, and that is to bring together the past and the present that is constantly evolving in a way that allows us to appreciate our heritage even more...And this effort today is, I think, typical of the work [Alan Jabbour and the people who work with him at the Folklife Center] do, the bringing together of contemporary music and musicians to appreciate what is all too rapidly vanishing, a part of our common history." Photo by Yusef El-Amin

# "The Spirit Cries: Music from the Rainforests of South America & the Caribbean"



Aluku performers Aleina Apalobi and Sephiro Mais and anthropologist Ken Bilby at the March 15 symposium "Music and Cultural Conservation." Photo by Yusef El-Amin

By Kenneth Bilby and James McKee

Thousands of miles separate the peoples whose voices and instruments you will hear on the new recording *The Spirit Cries: Music from the Rainforests of South America & the Caribbean*. Some are South American Indians whose ancestors arrived in the Americas thousands of years ago; others are African-Americans whose forbears were brought as slaves from Africa but a few centuries ago. Some speak Native American languages, while others speak

creoles influenced by European and African languages. What links them is that their ways of life bind them to their forest environment in one of the Western Hemisphere's remaining tropical rainforests.

Music is one of the keenest cultural tools that these people possess for the spiritual encounter with their gods, their neighbors, and the rainforest that surrounds them. It serves as a medium of spiritual communication, while at the same time binding communities together. Like other items of culture, this music of

the rainforest reflects the creative friction of cultural encounters among Africans, Europeans, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. In the rainforests, as in New York, Havana, and Rio de Janeiro, the vision of three continents has come together in a new music.

Among all these people, the natural environment remains inseparably linked to belief systems and spiritual values. Whether derived from Native American or African sources, or a hybrid of various traditions, much of the music on this record is

integrally connected to settings where healing, spiritual forces, and practical knowledge of the forest converge.

### The Garífuna of Belize

The story of the Garífuna, the Black Caribs of the Central American Coast, begins in 1635, when Spanish slave ships bound for Barbados sank near the island of Bequia, in the Lesser Antilles. Many African slaves escaped to nearby St. Vincent, where they intermarried with the aboriginal Caribs. Their descendants thrived as a rainforest culture until 1797, when the British Navy deported them to islands in the Bay of Honduras. From the Bay Islands the Black Caribs made their way to the mainland, where they established beach settlements. Today about seventy-thousand Garífuna live in fifty coastline communities in Belize and Honduras. While in the past the Garífuna

lived and worked in their own villages, seasonal migration to Tegucigalpa and other inland cities in search of wage labor has become increasingly necessary for many to survive.

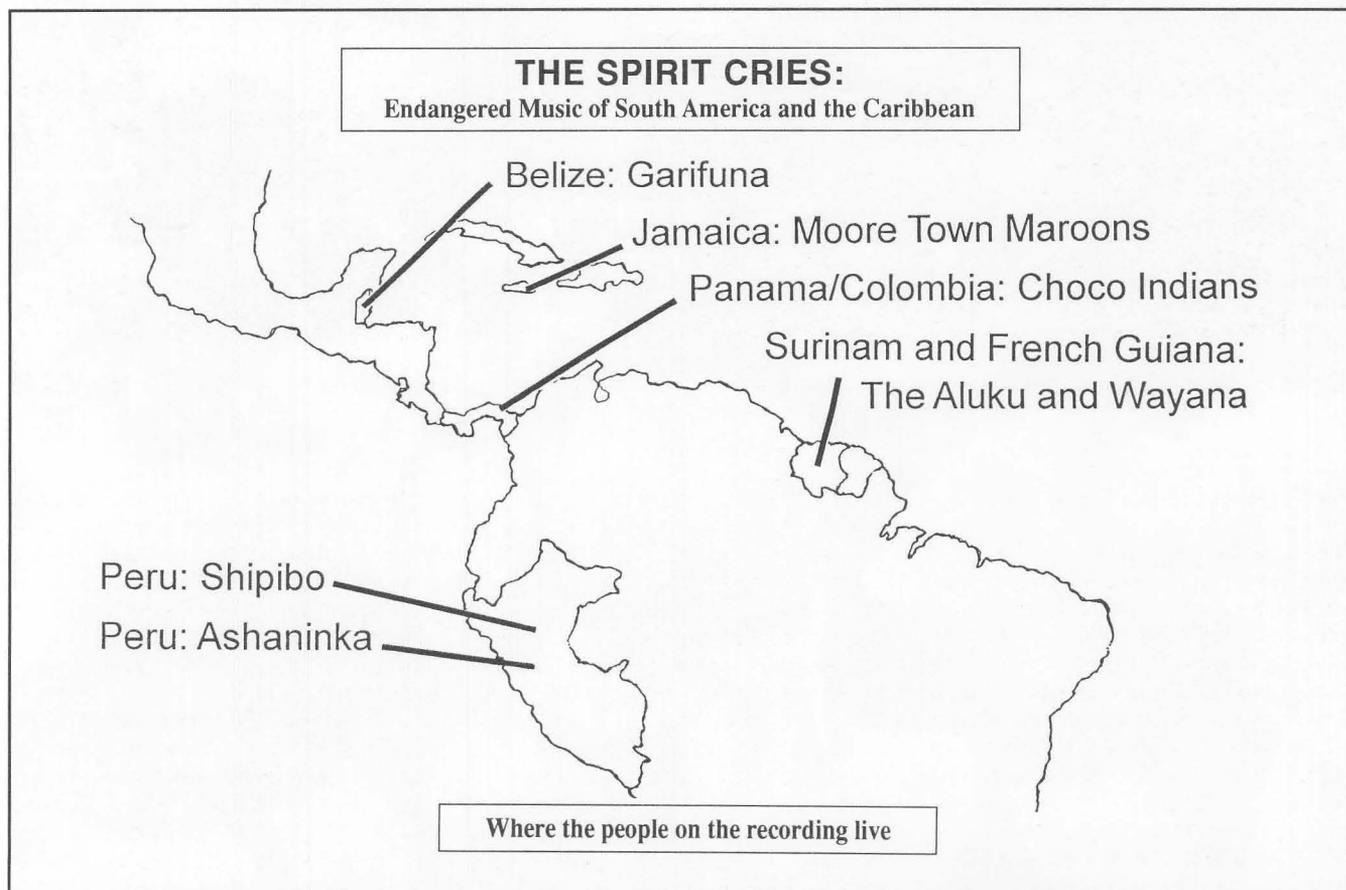
The eclectic language of the Garífuna is a mixture of Carib and Arawak, heavily influenced by French, Spanish, and English. Their music forges African, Native American, and European elements into a wide variety of styles unified by common themes such as death, unrequited love, longing, travel, and alienation. Echoes of Africa by way of the Caribbean are heard in Garífuna drumming; song types such as *abaimahani* and *arumahana* point to Native American roots; *berusu* songs, *punta* dances, and Catholic hymns show the Hispanic influence of the Central American mainland; and holiday masquerades have antecedents in English mumming. These diverse influences

illustrate the evolution of the Garífuna from an island rainforest culture to a mainland beach culture and exemplify the adaptability that has enabled them to maintain a unified cultural front in the face of displacement and migration.

Drums are the most important instruments in Garífuna dance and ritual. The most common is a cylindrical, snared drum made from local hardwoods and played with the hands. Secular dance songs require two drummers. The support drummer provides a steady rhythmic pattern and the lead drummer plays elaborate patterns on top of this rhythmic palette. On ritual occasions three drummers are employed.

### The Indians of Chocó

The lowland rainforests of the Chocó, a region of coastal Colombia and southern Panama, receive almost three hundred inches of rain-



fall per year, making it one of the wettest places in the world. The Chocó is home to over eight thousand species of plants, many of them unique to the area. The Noanama, the largest Native American group in the region, grow cassava, plantains, sugar cane, and a variety of tropical fruits. The women raise domestic animals while the men, renowned as canoeists, travel great distances by river to fish and to clear new land for planting. Noanama music includes agricultural ceremonies, healing rituals, and creation myths. Instruments include canoe-shaped struck slit-logs, single and double-membraned drums, panpipes, end-blown and side-blown flutes, seashell trumpets, bull-roarers, and whistling tops.

### The Shipibo and the Asháninka

In its nine-hundred-mile course from the Andes highlands to the

jungles of the Amazon Basin, the Ucayali River of eastern Peru traverses *La Selva*, one of the most formidable tropical rainforests in the Western Hemisphere. With virtually no dry season, these vast lowlands teem with plant and animal life. After heavy rainstorms the forest floor is flooded, inhibiting large-scale agriculture and ground travel. The Ucayali serves as the only practical transportation for many of the 250,000 Native Americans who live here.

The Shipibo have a history of contact with the Incas and established ambivalent relationships with Spanish missionaries beginning around 1532. The Asháninka (also known in Spanish as the *Campa*), whose origins lie in the Orinoco region, rebuffed Franciscan attempts to convert them as early as 1635. Outsiders arrived to the region in great numbers during the rubber boom of the early 1920s; they were

soon followed by foreign and domestic oil and timber interests.

Both groups use rainforest plants for dyes, body paints, and medicines, and both induce visions with the aid of psychotropic plants allied with spirit counterparts. The Asháninka, for example, believe that a shaman who takes a certain drug becomes spiritually linked with its source, the ayahuasca plant. In an altered state of consciousness, the shaman performs ritual songs that unite everyday life with the divine realm of the gods.

### The Aluku and the Wayana

Virtually all of French Guiana and Suriname is blanketed by rain forest. Dispersed in little villages on some of the larger interior rivers live a number of small indigenous populations. One such waterway, the Lawa River, forms part of the border between French Guiana and

Garífuna drummer performs for a spirit possession ritual, Dangriga, Belize, 1981. Photo by Carol Jenkins



Suriname. More than two centuries ago, two very different peoples, the Wayana and the Aluku, came together on this frontier and formed an almost symbiotic relationship.

The Wayana are a Native American people. The Aluku (also known as the Boni) are Maroon descendants of African slaves who escaped from coastal Surinamese plantations during the eighteenth century. Like the Jamaican Maroons, they successfully adapted to the interior rainforest, forming a new African-American society even as they fought a guerrilla war against the Dutch colony. In 1776-77, under pressure from Dutch colonial troops, the Aluku moved across the border into French Guiana, where they have remained ever since.

During this turbulent period, the Aluku and the Wayana joined in an alliance sealed with sacred oaths. Today Aluku and Wayana gardeners sometimes make their camps and gardens alongside one another, and children from adjoining camps may play together and grow up speaking both languages. Members of the two groups often visit one another's villages and sometimes participate in each other's ceremonies. In fact, the Aluku and Wayana today agree that they share a common territory. In spite of striking cultural differences, they have managed to live in peaceful coexistence, maintaining mutual respect toward each other's way of life.

Wayana music includes a rich variety of styles connected with social dances, initiation rites, funeral ceremonies, shamanistic healing, and other functions. Instruments include a rasp made from a turtle shell, various transverse flutes made from deer-bone and bamboo, a large end-blown bamboo trumpet, and seed-pod rattles tied around the ankles for dancing. Songs are often performed unaccompanied as well. The Aluku musical tradition is one of the most African to have survived in the Americas. Music serves many purposes, from funeral and mourning rites and healing ceremonies to social dances and events revolving around cooperative labor. Most Aluku styles use three drums—the lead drum, supporting drum, and pulse-keeper. Some styles also employ a long wooden board beaten by several players wielding pairs of sticks and ankle rattles acquired from

their Wayana neighbors. They also possess a rare African-derived instrument called *agwado*, a gourd through which three small musical bows are inserted. The bow strings are plucked and the gourd resonator tapped to accompany solo songs.

Although the rain forest surrounding the Wayana and Aluku villages remains virtually untouched, the two communities have been exposed to intense economic and cultural pressures since 1969, when much of their territory was incorporated fully into the French state. Since then, village life has been radically transformed by large-scale migration, French schools, municipal politics, welfare payments, European mail-order catalogs, and individual land ownership. Once self-sufficient societies well-adapted to the rain forest, the Aluku and Wayana are now ethnic enclaves. Whether their unique knowledge, wisdom, and artistic skills will survive the next two decades is far from certain.

### The Jamaican Maroons

Most Caribbean islands were once covered by rainforests. Today only a fraction of the forest canopy remains, and some countries, such as Haiti, have been entirely denuded. Jamaica has been more fortunate. Those few visitors who climb the back roads into the eastern hills of the island find themselves in another world. Here in the Blue Mountains and the John Crow Mountains there is well over one hundred square miles of undisturbed rainforest. Within this region lies Moore Town, the main village of the Windward Maroons, descendants of African slaves who escaped from coastal plantations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and waged a guerrilla war against British colonists for nearly a century. Maroon hunters still range over the mountain wilderness in search of the wild pig, and Maroon herbalists still seek out rare medicinal plants far from human habitation.

The early Maroons were faced with the forbidding task of surviving in the Jamaican rainforest. As much as anything else, Maroon elders today agree, it was the spiritual tradition of the Kromanti Dance that ensured the ancestors' survival. In the later hours of the dance, after an ancestor has been called into his head

by the Kromanti drums, the Kromanti specialist, or *fete-man* ("fight-man"), vanishes into the night, guided by the possessing spirit. For hours he collects the wild plants the spirits show him. Each plant has its own spirit, its own source of healing power. The *fete-man* works with other spirits of the forest as well—spirits manifested in forms such as crayfish, vultures, and yellow snakes. When he returns, he uses the powers of all these spirits to effect the miraculous cures and spiritual healing for which Maroons are known throughout the island.

In recent years the Maroons have been visited by missionaries from evangelical sects, many of whose leaders try to stamp out African-derived religious practices. Though the Kromanti rites are still practiced in private, trained Kromanti specialists are diminishing, and only a handful of exemplary Kromanti drummers remains. The Kromanti musical tradition, one of the most African to have survived in the Western World, allows Maroons to tap the powers of those early ancestors who first unlocked the secrets of the natural environment. Just as north coast development now threatens the rainforest surrounding the Maroon settlements, so the missionaries and proselytizers threaten to silence the Kromanti drums.

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*James McKee is an ethnomusicologist who assisted in the production of The Spirit Cries for the American Folklife Center's Endangered Music Project.*

# The Politics of Amplification: Notes on “Endangered Music” and Musical Equity

By Stephen Feld

Ten years ago my politely obscure academic life as a researcher into the music and culture of the Papua New Guinea rainforests was interrupted by a phone call. The voice on the other end turned out to be Mickey Hart. After he came over to talk about New Guinea drums, we listened to a soundscape tape I had just made of rainforest birds and the music they inspire in a New Guinea community. When the half hour encompassing the sounds of a whole day in Bosavi was over, Mickey looked over at me and said, “that’s incredible . . . and it’s much too important to be kept an academic secret.” And then, hardly missing a beat, he suggested playing it during intermission at a Grateful Dead performance! I gulped. “You want to play *this* at a Grateful Dead show?” Mickey smiled. “Of course! Don’t you understand? If I’m hungry to hear this, thousands of others are too!”

I was stunned by the passion and directness of this statement. Mickey seemed impatient, almost insulted that music like this wasn’t readily available for everyone to hear. Hardly the kind of attitude I was used to among my academic colleagues, whose vision was overwhelmingly less populist. Even though many in my profession, those of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and folklore have spent years living with other people and, in some cases, deeply and sincerely absorbing their systems of knowledge, academics do not typically imagine themselves as activists in the process of making other worlds more known and appreciated—except within the tiny world of their own, the world of the academy.

This made me think a lot about the difference between my work, for



Aluku performers Aleina Apalobi and Sephiro Maïs singing in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress, March 15. Photo by Yusef El-Amin

instance, telling a class of twenty about the destructive effects of logging and mining on rainforest environment and culture, and Mickey’s work, amplifying music live and on record for millions of people. And I

wondered, was Mickey putting me on? Or could it really be true that a world of people, like those who love rock and roll music, would also have the desire to listen to a Papua New Guinea musical world?

I will come back to that question and the stories that answer it in a minute, but I want to first consider “endangered music”—how it is both a term of alarm and a term of celebration; and how the idea is linked to an agenda that uses recording technology to promote musical empowerment.

The idea of “endangered music” immediately calls to mind the more familiar idea that is a mainstay of ecology, the idea of “endangered species.” In both cases the terms remind us that loss of diversity is a form of impoverishment, whether in the biological or cultural sphere. More importantly, these kinds of loss and impoverishment are linked together, as every instance of the thinning out of biological diversity is connected to the thinning out of cultural, linguistic, and artistic diversity. So, linking the struggles for environments with the futures of the peoples whose lives are tied to them is essential to promoting the integrity of ecology and human rights.

But there is some risk in voicing these concerns with the word *endangered*. Equating music and culture with animal and plant species might lead some to believe that this is about human zoos, reservations, and conservation parks, or about a desire to freeze time, to deny change and history. Those ideas have to be rejected. Indigenous peoples, and indeed all dominated peoples, need control over the terminology and imagery of how their interests and identities are represented. For some, a term like “endangered music” may feel inappropriate, and outsiders must be sensitive to that response.

Yet, for those of us working from another position, those of us who are trying to create an alliance between activists for ecological and cultural survival, “endangered music” is a very useful term. When environmentalists report that we lose thousands of species of plants and animals every year, we should be asking, in parallel, how many cultures and languages are we losing? And with them, how many myths and stories? How many songs and instruments? How many human artistic inventions? It is the existence of questions and issues like these that make the phrase “endangered music” an important one in an activist vocabulary.

The idea of “endangered music,” then, is a way of talking back to a world that has become musically diminished and a world that, despite rapid advances in the spread of technology, is actually less hearable. Raising the cry of “endangered music” is a way of urging the amplification of voices to actively counter the thinning out or the silencing of musical diversity.

The “endangered music” idea is also a way of talking back to those in the environmental movement who imagine that the only thing at stake in ecological destruction is cute and cuddly animals and the plants that Western pharmacy needs to cure cancer. Hearing “endangered music” dramatically reminds us that the struggle for these places is about much more—for societies under threat, for the survival of people whose knowledge and management of the local environment is central to expanding global knowledge, including medicinal resources.

While “endangered music” may be a new label, the urgency to recognize and foster musical empowerment is neither new nor unique to the Library of Congress Endangered Music Project. Some have forcefully voiced these concerns before, perhaps none more strongly than Alan Lomax, whose term “cultural equity” and center for its promotion through the “global jukebox” of songs he and others have collected has been an inspiration to many who have followed along this path.

But there are some new alliances now being created to promote this musical and cultural equity. And one key development involves people with the access and ability to share the best in musical technology and distribution networks. To understand the change they are bringing about, we must remember that for many years indigenous peoples and dominated minorities often took a second-class ride on cheap recording equipment. The intentions to honor the music might have been there, but much so-called “noncommercial” recording involved minimal audio quality, minimal budgets, and lack of promotion and circulation. Not to mention few or no royalties to return to the musicians or community where the music was

recorded. Lack of circulation, like lack of royalties, even came to be linked to claims for musical authenticity. In other words, the less commercial the product and its distribution, the more “pure” the music was thought to be. So marginality in the marketplace was sometimes taken to validate “real,” “authentic,” “ethno” music. This was often a result of academic hostility to involvement with popular commercial enterprise.

It is an unfortunate irony, but many attempts to respect musical diversity also, unwittingly, reproduced musical colonialism by bringing us recordings whose exotic content was matched by their muffled grooves. That is why the alternative that Mickey has insisted on is so important—that the best equipment, engineers, budgets, and distribution networks can and should be shared beyond the world of Western popular and elite arts. This kind of activist stance on musical empowerment imagines that the people recorded and listeners everywhere can be beneficiaries of a different kind of musical equity.

That is where Mickey’s concern and mine came back together. Once his Rykodisc series *The World* was in place, Mickey offered to produce a new soundscape recording for me. Our goal was to dramatically amplify the musical ecology of the Bosavi rainforest in Papua New Guinea and its significance to the Kaluli people, whose music is directly inspired by the sounds of surrounding birds, crickets, and waterfalls. Mickey’s crew customized the best field recording package available, I went off and made new recordings, and then spent four months editing with great engineering help and great equipment. Then the recording was launched with tremendous support from Rainforest Action Network and Rykodisc, who continue to enthusiastically promote it and explore new audiences. Coming from the nickel-and-dime, do-it-yourself, “sorry, there’s no budget for that” world of academia, I have been overwhelmed by all this. The idea that there are people who really care about making distant musics available in this kind of high-quality, high-profile way opens a new page in the story of musical activism. And with it potential for new cultural dialogues, like this one:

**O**n one of the sequences of *Voices of the Rainforest* you can hear Ulahi, the disc's featured composer, singing songs with the water flow of a local creek. After singing the first of the new songs she had composed since my return, Ulahi spontaneously launched into a tag melody. Her words were:

wo:-wo: ni America kalu-o-e  
 gi wi oba-e  
 ni Australia gayo-e  
 gi wi oba-e  
 ni America kalu-o-e  
 gi wi oba-e  
 ni Australia gayo-e  
 ni America kalu-o-e  
 a-ye wo:-wo:

(calling) my America men  
 what are your names?  
 my Australia women  
 who can you be?  
 my America men  
 who are you?  
 my Australia women  
 my America men  
 calling out "wo:-wo:"

Ulahi repeated these phrases several times; then, as my tape recorder kept running, she switched to speaking voice, and said:

Well, myself, thinking about it, speaking sadly, I won't see your place but you see mine, I don't know your names, so I'm wondering, I'm thinking like that, you

people living in far away lands, listening to me, I haven't heard your land names, so who are you? That's what I'm saying; you, Steve, having come here before, you can say, "my name is Steve, America man," but all the others, what are your names? "Many people will hear your Bosavi songs," you said like that to me before, but thinking about it, singing by myself I'm thinking, "What are your names?" that's what I was thinking. I don't really know your land names, just America, Australia, so I'm sadly singing like that so that they can hear it.

To understand this you must know that Kaluli songs are maps of local lands. These songs take their listeners on journeys, and these journeys are memorial ones, tracing the paths of spirit birds by citing all of the forest places they might frequent. Because I told Ulahi that many new people would hear her songs, she wanted to reach out to them. And the Kaluli way to connect with others near or far is by singing their lands, citing the placenames that make up the journeys we call biography. So Ulahi's little improvisation emerged at a moment when she thought about a world of people who would hear her, a world she'd never personally encounter. Her words imagine our humanity and presence, as well as our strangeness, our absence. Like all Kaluli singers whose best songs might make their

listeners weep, Ulahi is wondering if, when we hear her voice, we might feel both her sense of recognition and her sense of loss.

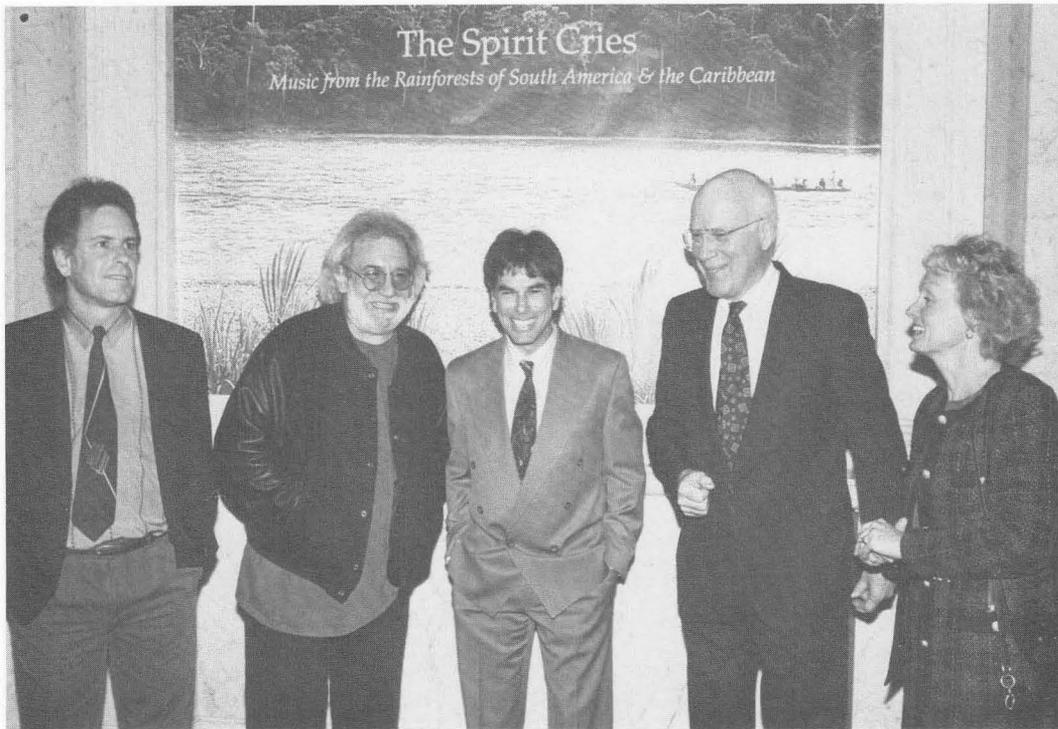
This connection across huge cultural divides has touched many listeners in America and Australia. It touched Kaluli people, too. For example, after listening to the recording in its entirety just a few months ago, Ayasilo said to me, "Maybe your people can hear us now, maybe they will understand about our place." And Kaluli people are even more excited about the commercial success this recording has had, because the Bosavi Peoples Fund, a trust to distribute its royalties, has been able to fund needed projects in this isolated community that is currently spinning in the chaos of local oil and gold development and logging.

**B**ut, at the risk of sounding ungracious, I must voice concern that projects like these don't become a kind of musical tokenism. Here is what I mean: there are around 750 languages spoken in New Guinea, and just as many different artistic universes there. And there is just one commercially available CD, of a Papua New Guinea music and environment. And that one might—just possibly, maybe, hopefully—be available at your local record shop. But let's remember, it's only one recording. How long until we have the next? And the next? And how long until all of these musics, these

Alan Jabbour and Mickey Hart at the March 15 symposium "Music and Cultural Conservation." At an earlier interview with Ann McLean of the Library's Music Division, Hart spoke of his interest in world music:

"There is no such thing as isolated music anymore, . . . unless you're behind monastery walls for six hundred years where you get a music that is pure in that respect. [But] we're not really looking for music that is pure, because this music has a need in the community. It has a real function. This is not art music. This music goes through every part of life. This music accompanies every ceremony, every rite. It's very important music, and this music has been able to live on and still continues." Photo by Yusef El-Amin





At a reception in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress, March 15, Grateful Dead members Bob Weir, Jerry Garcia, and Mickey Hart, along with Senator and Mrs. Patrick Leahy. The Vermont senator acknowledges being a fan of the group for years. Photo by Yusef El-Amin

peoples, their artistic achievements, their survival struggles are a routine part of our cultural consciousness? That's why Mickey's admonition of ten years ago keeps ringing in my head: "this music is too important to be kept an academic secret." And all the more so when the music is tied to promoting more equitable futures.

Like all aspects of life and environment, music is part of a precarious ecology. This precarious ecology is why some music is "endangered," and why we are here, participating in this rite of amplification. It is a rite that celebrates the creators and the music that can be heard on *The Spirit Cries*. It is also a rite to remember that while we live in a world of tremendous cultural loss, musical diversity can still be actively amplified. And one forceful contribution to doing that is to create new links between the academic, public, and commercial sectors in order to extend to indigenous and dominated peoples the networks of music recording, distribution, and broadcast that have excluded them for far too long. This is what the collaboration of the Library of Congress, Mickey's 360° Productions, and Rykodisc signifies to me.

I recently experienced the excitement that *Voices of the Rainforest* generated when I played it back in Bosavi communities, and the excitement in the Papua New Guinea Education

Department when a copy of the tape was placed in every high school in the country. That is why I want to end by emphasizing how important it is that projects like this do not just impact our airways, record stores, and home stereos; do not just end up enlightening and gratifying us. The recordings, the royalties, the activism, the enthusiasm—all of this must get back into the communities where it came from. This is where it can have the kind of impact on live music-making, on cultural and environmental integrity that will fully justify the mission of these projects.

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#### EDITOR'S NOTES (from page 2)

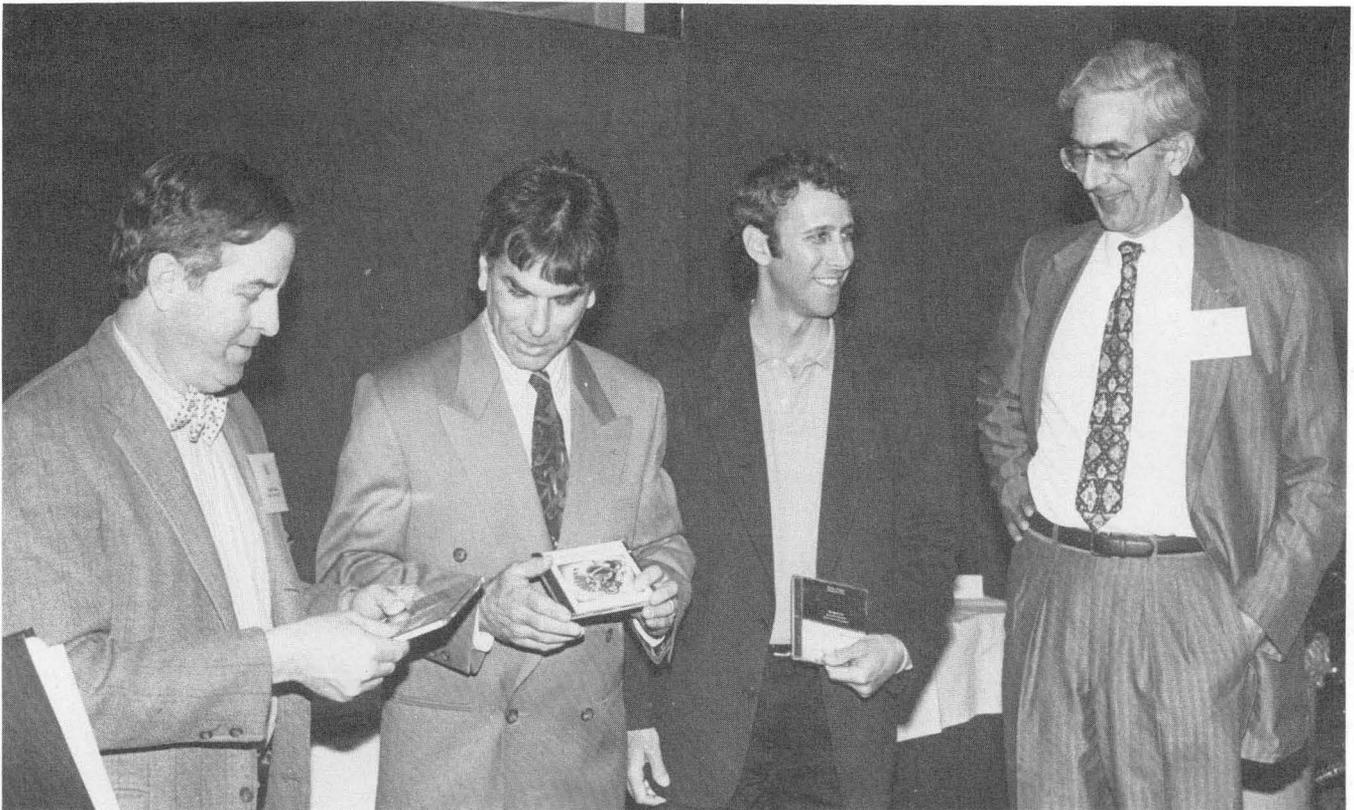
that's what it's all about, that's what the Library of Congress was made for, dissemination of information .... The time is right for it, you understand; this couldn't have happened before now. It's not like anybody was holding out. I mean, there was not a market, really, for this the last few years. Now, we're able to take these valuable recordings, and spruce them up and release them in CD. The time is right now, the people want to hear it, and it's time [for this music] to be released."

*The Spirit Cries: Music from the Rainforests of South America & the Caribbean (Rykodisc CD 10250) is available from the Library of Congress Sales Shop and at music stores nationwide.*

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Smithsonian ethnomusicologist Thomas Venum, Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart, Rykodisc president Don Rose, and Center director Alan Jabbour at the Library of Congress, March 15, for a symposium and a reception in celebration of the Rykodisc release *The Spirit Cries: Music from the Rainforests of South America & the Caribbean*, a selection from the Archive of Folk Culture. Photo by Yusef El-Amin

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