

# TUNE INTO YESTERDAY

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Treasure Hunt Update  
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50 Years of German Radio Archives  
by Bernard Wichert

**German Broadcasting Archive (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv)  
Frankfurt/Main celebrates its 50th birthday**  
by Bernard Wichert

Under the title >re:play< 50 Years DRA the German Broadcasting Archive celebrates its 50th birthday in Frankfurt am Main (13.-23. August) and in Berlin -Potsdam-Babelsberg (3.-13. September), 2002. Being in contact with the leading personnel (Dept. Spoken Word) for nearly 25 years now I had the pleasure to meet old and new acquaintances and to have hour-long talks in one of the many buildings of the Hessian Radio Station which is situated on the same grounds.

On display were some of the historic treasures taken out of the vaults to demonstrate the historic and technical development of recording. Among them were Brechts „The Lindbergh Flight“ of 1930, the single-sided disc of Zeppelin asking the German people to donate for a new air-ship; some gelatine discs recorded by a private soldier in Norway back in 1940 with greetings to his beloved at home. Of course the various machines to play cylinders, cardboard discs, shellac, acetate with could be seen, early wire and tape recorders etc.

Several speeches and lectures could be listened to. The first ones were the opening addresses by the Head of the DRA, Hans-Gerhard Stüb who had followed Prof. Leonhard in office, Prof. Dr. Klaus Berg, Head of the Hessian Radio and Head of the DRA-Board of Directors, and Kurt Degreller, Head of „Memorativ“, an institution to preserve the audio-visual culture of Switzerland. Anke Leenings, Vice-Head of the DRA, held a lecture on the holdings of the Archives with lots of acoustical examples.

In 1952 a „Lautarchiv des deutschen Rundfunks“ (Sound Archive of the German Broadcasting) was created by all the German radio broadcasting stations intending to have a central sound archive. Its primary task was to develop and build a cataloguing system of all the surviving recordings after the war, preserve the discs and make dubs. As an institution that is financed by all the radio and TV (not private) stations it has to provide these stations with recordings, mostly excerpts, for feature broadcasts etc. But that does not mean that every recording is kept in Frankfurt or Berlin. As the former Reichsrundfunk discs and tapes are their basis, one can say that with the post-war period several sound archives developed: those recordings that were given to the DRA and those we find with the various German broadcasting stations. They keep their productions and do not store them with the DRA, but they give information on what they have and add to their own archives.

So we find here the original task of the DRA again: to be a sort of central catalogue and address to find sounds. The DRA is not an institution that wants to have the original, physical media, but the sound only, the German sound as most of the foreign language recordings are and were recorded by the broadcasting stations like West German Radio Cologne, North German Radio in Hamburg, Bavarian Radio in Munich etc. These are deposited there and are of no importance for Frankfurt except for reference purposes. The main task at the moment is to fill the data (detailed information on every recording) into a data bank that can be opened by every German Broadcasting Station including audio-files. A giant computer sound data bank has -momentarily not every, but -plenty of sounds (i.e. 13.000) ready to be listened to. But it is not accessible to others.

Since the end of the 1990s a special department (ZWM- Digital Archive for Historical Documents) is in charge to list up and feed a data bank with every new CD production. The entertainment industry supplies the data every day for the ZWM online. On such a way a complete listing of every title produced and distributed in Germany is compiled.

In the last decade the representative of the DRA-Spoken Word dept. has been very busy in finding places around the world where lost German Reichsrundfunk discs could be. They came across an archive in the former Czechoslovakia, near Prague. It is reported that after the war at least two train-wagon loads of RRG-discs were sent direction East, and that one part of these found its place there.

In the mid 90s, after long discussions about prices, several orders were given to start a process of dubbing. First the Czechs did not have the facilities to dub these negative matrices but in the end they found a machine somewhere in their country to make it possible.

The rest of the discs seems to have disappeared somewhere in Russia.

So, with a limited état it was and still is difficult to acquire lost recordings. The same happened with the BBC resp British Sound Archive. After the war the British had made hundreds of discs from the Reichsrundfunk their own (let's not talk about "looting") and offered them for dubbing at an enormous price to the DRA. The listing of nearly 200 pages with detailed information on the discs including the Reichsrundfunk Catalogue Numbers was drawn up by German POWs in GB. And, as a matter of fact a lot of these discs, important for Germany, could not be found anymore or were reported broken.

The „Radio Archives East“ (formerly GDR Archives) became part of the DRA in 1994. They could be „saved“ from being sold to a media group. Thus they would have disappeared forever and there would have been no access whatsoever for the years to come.

Holdings in Frankfurt:

- 900 Edison cylinders
- 2000 Decellith and other foils
- 3600 Reichsrundfunk (RRG) tapes
- 6600 Archive tapes
- 950 piano rolls
- the complete BBC German Service tapes (a gift from London end of the 1990s)
- the complete written archives (on radiobroadcasting history), files from 1923 onwards (8-10 running meters), 10000 books related to the subject
- the picture archive: focussed first on Weimar Republic and 3rd Reich, since 1990 additional material of the RRG once in East German archives

Holdings in Berlin-Babelsberg (former GDR Archives):

- 350.000 sound carriers
- 100.000 spoken word
- 36.000 different sounds (e.g. birds, cars, every day life)
- 100.000 film/magnetic recordings of TV broadcasts (among others not documented West-German political features and information broadcasts)
- 7000 running meters written archive
- 5 million newspaper clippings
- 3 million pictures
- 7000 books

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