

# Heritage policy at the Smithsonian Institution?

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*“What heritage policy at the Smithsonian? Let me know when you find it”*

*-- Richard Kurin, 2012*

# Intangible Heritage and SI

- No unitary heritage policy
- Multiple museum *practices* that predate ICH 2003
- Heritage practices are not policies, but they go hand in hand. Good practices inform good policies, case by case. Good policies in turn map better practices and ethical guidelines
- What's needed for heritage policy in 21st C museums:  
A critical, reflexive museology that
  - keeps pace with changing museum practice (temple to forum)
  - is grounded by museum collections
  - collaborates with grassroots communities
  - speaks to global cultural policy imperatives of democracy, justice, equity and voice

What would such a grounded, participatory museology look like at the SI?

- Collaborative curation
- Civic and local community engagement
- “No folklore without the folk”
- Broad public access and safe space for democratic discourse, difficult subjects, museum frictions
- Responsible restitution

This goes well beyond definition of ICOM 2007:

*A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.*

## Returns and Restitution at the SI: a very short list

- Sacred objects: NAGPRA/American Indian
- Human remains: Natural History Museum
- Oral histories with griots: virtual collections in Af-American
- Antiquities from the colonial era: Art museums
- Art Provenance in the World War II era: Freer and Sackler Galleries
- Underwater archeology: Arctic Study Center
- Digital returns: Aleut/Unangax, American Indian, SI Photo Initiative
- Living traditions, Sound and Music: Folklife, Folkways
- After The Return: Digital Repatriation and Circulation of Indigenous knowledge

# Restitution, Returns, Repatriation

- A form of cultural rights

*“Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. Everyone has the right to the protection of moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary, or artistic production to which he is author”*

-- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 27

- Cultural rights and music returns
  - Music returns as grounds for theory beyond ownership and artistic expression
  - New way of thinking through museum obligations for ICH
  - Digital returns *can* be transformative for communities

*“(Music) Repatriation can be considered not only as a partial means of restitution for historical injuries suffered but as a provision of unique resources (to communities) necessary to enable distinct futures to be articulated”*

*-- Coleman, Coombe and MacAlairt, A Broken Record, 2009*

# Why Music?

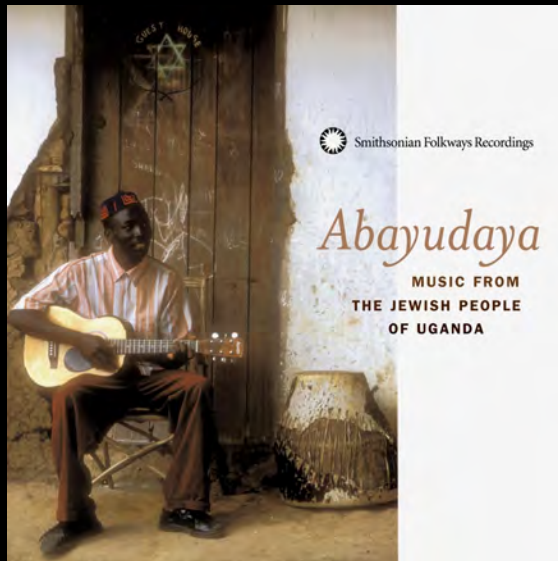
- Rosemary Coombe: “mnemonic power of music”
  - Music as missing link in returns as cultural rights
  - Need to look beyond the visual genre
  - Global context - from NAGPRA to UNESCO Conventions as framework
- Music as ideal heritage genre to ‘think with’. Why?:
  - Recorded music at heart of worldwide “culture wars”
  - Music as category in Western law has the capacity to divorce ethnological content from the *social* capacities of song
- Returning music from ‘universal museums’ can thus have transformative effects on communities’ cultural renewal, social justice, agency, and indigenous self-determination



# Why Folkways?

- Unique heritage archive (ethnographic itunes)
  - Archival collection of traditional music from around world
  - Non-profit recording label at the US national museum
- Innovative returns
  - Duty to keep catalogue available in perpetuity
  - Mission that balances revenue needs with cultural documentation, collaborative curation and global appeal
  - Folkways embodies two innovative ideas for 20th C. museums
    - a) Digital returns of recording rights to countries of origin
    - b) Circulation of IK through publication, payment of royalties and license fees
- Brief History of Folkways
  - Asch ('48-'86), Rinzier, Seeger ('87, royalty reform)
  - Evolving repatriation practice since 2000

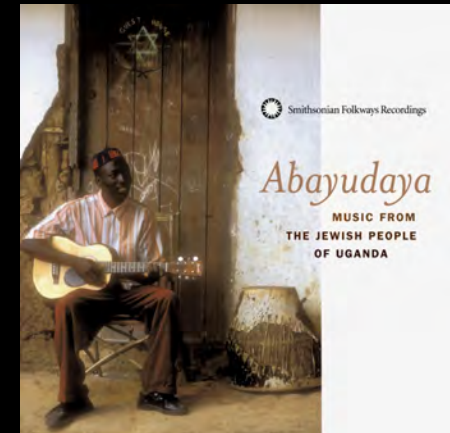
# Music Returns at Folkways - Four Case Studies



Tag or label

# Abayudaya: Revitalizing Community

- 2000 Abayudaya Jewish Music album
  - Musical life recorded of entire community through local Ugandan music, rich choral singing, Afropop, 19th C. European music and traditional drummers
  - Grammy Award, 2005 for Best Traditional World Music Album
  - Royalties funded 19 university scholarships for community
- 2012 Interfaith coffee cooperative and *Delicious Peace (Mirembe Kawomera)*
  - 300 farmers from the cooperative sing on themes ranging from fair trade to agriculture



*"We have been saved by our music" -- Aaron Kintu Moses, Abayudaya School Headmaster*

# Bosavi: Right to Control Use

- Redistribution through the extraordinary gesture of the compiler
- 1991: Steven Feld *Voices of the Rainforest* CD and the Bosavi People's Fund NGO.  
Fund determined how royalties would be spent: financed school, clinics, re-release of a 3-CD set of Bosavi music on Folkways.
- 2000. *Bosavi: Rainforest Music from Papua New Guinea* draws on 2 generations of musicians and 25 years of field recordings.
- Royalties from recordings over 10 years:  
Bosavi Digital Archive  
Educational scholarships for younger generation



# Western Australian Desert Aborigines: Right to Secrecy

- Right to secrecy over sacred knowledge
- 1966. recording with Folkways Records for Ngantajara people, half of which included male initiation rites and songs .
- 2006. Folkways questioned about propriety of public availability  
Museum navigation of law:
  - Right of access to female adolescents according to US free speech, copyright law, recording contract
  - Australian consultation with communities and recordings found restricted to everyone not just women!
  - Original recordist R.A. Gould agreed that album should be taken out of print.
- Return of control over use easy in theory, difficult in practice
  - Prior publication vs. future recall
  - Balance respect for privacy with request to study them
  - Indigenism (secrecy) vs. open-source access model

# Kiowa Peyote: Right to hear Ancestors' Voices

- Right to keep sacred knowledge in public domain
- 1954. Recording of Washoe Peyotists song cycles “captured” under the influence of peyote at an open prayer meeting  
2004: Washoe wanted their recording taken out of archive. SI complied
- 2009: Folkways explored propriety of another peyote recording: Kiowa Meeting (recorded in 1964). Songs sung in casual not ceremonial cycles. Tribal council chief consulted
- Response went in opposite direction: full public access wanted



*“A 100 years from now, we want our children’s children to hear this music”*

*-- Ronald Topfi, Kiowa tribal chief*

# Implications: Toward best practices and policies?

- Big Picture: Music Returns
  - Plurality even within one archive and one genre
  - Gaps, faultlines, heritage contests as important as consensus
- Raises questions about the music returns *process*:
  - What is 'community' (Abayudaya)
  - How to define Traditional Knowledge (Bosavi)
  - Who controls rights over access (Ngatatjara)
  - Should sacred knowledge remain public (Kiowa Peyotist)
- Raises questions about the *goals* of music restitution
  - Music not merely an expressive genre; it does cultural work
  - Restitution serves archival as well as indigenous social needs
  - Raises questions on Museum Obligations for ICH returns: How do we not just respond to claims (reactive) but actively work toward redistributive justice and indigenous self-determination (proactive)