



*Laura Boulton recording in Hungary in 1959.*

melodies and a well developed flute; a simple skin drum that is stretched between two men and beaten by a third and a four-tone talking drum. All four kinds of instruments—chordophones, aerophones, idiophones and membranophones—are represented in the collection. Many of them are truly works of art. Handmade by special craftsmen, they follow traditional and unique patterns and shapes, sometimes closely related to their functions in the spiritual, social and economic lives of the people.

Most materials in the collection are still being processed. Last year all the slides and negatives were placed in special archival preservation sleeves. Also, the printed documents were organized according to the geo-cultural regions and put into acid-free archival folders and boxes. This year the publications have been entered in a computer data base that contains basic bibliographic information. While at Indiana University, the collection has already been used for research, instruction and display. For example, Ronald Smith, Professor of Ethnomusicology, found the instrument collection very relevant for his project concerning zoomorphological ornamentation in musical instruments.

In the fall of 1988 an exhibit devoted to the life and work of Laura Boulton opened at the Mathers Museum. Many items from her collection, including photographs, books, articles and musical instruments are on display. The exhibit will be open throughout 1989.

Laura Boulton died in 1980. She genuinely believed that music was a universal means of communication and, as such, the key to cross-cultural understanding. Her years of fieldwork and ethnomusicological research produced a large collection of music and music-related materials that are not simply preserved for posterity, but for years to come will be a rich source of information and inspiration for further studies and explanation of musical phenomena.

## Report on a Field Collection from Sierra Leone

*Laura Arntson Harris*

"The 'old mouth' can explain things to the 'new ears'." So goes a proverb I was told in the course of an interview with an elder of Silamania. I had come to Silamania, in the Wara Wara Yagala Chiefdom of the Northern Province of Sierra Leone, in order to carry out dissertation research<sup>1</sup> among Maninka (Mandingo) musicians. I sought out not only music specialists within the society but also the men and women who could share with me their history and culture. One of the primary goals of my research was to learn how music performance repertoire fit into Maninka culture—that is, how music is organized and perceived by members of Maninka society. I came with my "new" ears and tape recorder, and left with new friends, a new name, and an even greater appreciation for the complexity and depth of West African musical and verbal artistry.<sup>2</sup>

With the help of my research assistant, Yahya Daramy, I conducted interviews and recorded music in Silamania, Sukurala and a number of other communities in the Koinadugu District of the Northern Province from November 1987 through April 1988. The almost sixty recorded hours that resulted are contained on fifty-five cassettes, catalogued under accession number 88-072-F at the Archives of Traditional Music, and three additional cassettes (88-085-F) which represent research peripheral to the main collection.

The interviews I conducted focused on personal and community histories and on music performance in Maninka society. Much of the music I recorded occurred during interviews with music specialists and others. One music specialist in particular, a *jeliba* named Pa Sanasi Kuyateh, of Sukurala, became my key informant and contributed the bulk of material contained in the collection. Pa Kuyateh performs on *bala*, which is a wood-key xylophone constructed on a frame with gourd resonators. Accompanied by the *bala*, he sings words of praise to contemporary individuals, for which he receives gifts such as money, cloth or other goods.

Pa Kuyateh's praise-words come from the texts of epic narratives that are known, performed and passed along orally in different variants throughout the Mande world of West Africa. The individual language and culture groups known collectively as Mande include the Maninka, Yalunka, Koranko, Bambara, Mandinka and Dyula, among others, and are dispersed throughout Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea-Conakry, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and parts of Sierra Leone and Liberia. In the Mande world, music specialists and other artisans such as weavers, leather workers and blacksmiths are considered, ideally at least, to represent an endogamous occupational group.<sup>3</sup> These specialists have access to artistic knowledge and, in the case of music specialists or *jelilu* (the plural of *jeli*), access to the knowledge of and ability to perform a particular musical and verbal repertoire. On many of the tapes in this collection, it is Pa Kuyateh who performs on the *bala* and his daughter, Hawa Kuyateh, a *jelimuso*, who sings the praise-songs of contemporary individuals (including myself, known to the people of Sukurala as



Fanta Kaleh) and past heroes such as Sunjata, Kondeh Buraima and Samori.

The majority of people among whom I did research and whose words are recorded in this collection call themselves Sankaran Maninka. The Sankaran Maninka came into what is now the Koinadugu District of the Northern Province of Sierra Leone from the Sankaran area of Guinea-Conakry, located between the head of the Niger River and the Sankarani River in the vicinity of Faranah and Kankan. By the 1860s there was an active long distance trade in gold, ivory, cloth and condiments, from Kankan and Sankaran, through Falaba (the Solima capital),<sup>4</sup> Bumban and Port Loko, to Freetown. The Sankaran Maninka followed this trade route, first as traders, then as refugees from Samori's battles,<sup>5</sup> and came to settle in Koinadugu with the Limba as their landlords and the Koranko as their neighbors to the south. Almamy Samori and his professional soldiers, the Sofas, had captured Kankan and in the 1880s had moved into Koinadugu and Solima in an attempt to gain control over the trade route to the coast.

When the Sankaran Maninka came into Sierra Leone, they brought with them oral traditions from Guinea and the older Mali Empire. The actions of warriors of Samori's stature, whether despised or admired, generate more material for epic singers. Accounts of Samori's strength as a warrior have now become part of the same specialized repertoire that includes the epic of Sunjata.<sup>6</sup>

The songs which commemorate past heroes,<sup>7</sup> their deeds, occupations and lineages are part of the *bologbili* repertoire performed by *jelilu*. This repertoire, translated as "heavy pattern," is defined by the texts and *bala* patterns from which a *jeli* draws for his improvisatory performance. Other songs in a *jeli*'s repertoire include those referred to as *tulonbolo* or "play" patterns. The play patterns are for the most part newer patterns, and draw on more mundane or everyday themes, whereas the heavy patterns harness the power to make people want to get up and fight—to prepare for battle. An example of a heavy pattern, performances of which can be heard throughout this collection, is *Duwa* or "The Vulture." This song is used to praise Sunjata, Samori, and contemporary individuals as well. It is not a song to be played all the time, however, because it places too heavy a burden on the *jeli* and the individual who is the object of such praise. The *Duwa* pattern carries with it a potency—it carries expectations of performance by a *jeli* and reception by those who may be praised with this pattern. As such it is attributed with certain agency of its own in performance.

In the course of my research, I became fascinated by the expectations Maninka society places on the performance and reception of particular patterns or songs in the *bala* repertoire (a *jeli*'s repertoire). I began asking Pa Kuyateh more questions about those "heavy" patterns (*bologbili*) and the differences between them and the *tulonbolo*. A number of tapes in the collection deal with this subject. During these interviews, Pa Kuyateh would often respond to my questions by playing the *bala* instead of searching for words that could not answer my questions as adequately.

As he explained, "If you do not say words to a person, will he know what is inside you? When you ask the *bala*, and you talk, that is the kind of talk he will say to you."<sup>8</sup>



Pa Kuyateh and others performing for an initiation celebration in Sukurala.

The *bala* can answer questions in its own voice or its own words. It is the job of the ethnomusicologist to attempt to understand what that voice is saying. This collection was recorded for the purpose of ethnomusicological research, but the music performances included on these tapes are enjoyable in themselves.

Pa Kuyateh performed a number of *tulonbolo* or play patterns from his repertoire for me also, including one called *Sini si*, or "To save for tomorrow." By depositing this collection in the Archives, I hope to save his words and his music for tomorrow.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Funding for this research was provided by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship for 1987-88.

<sup>2</sup> I owe a great deal of thanks and appreciation to the people of Silamania and Sukurala and the other places I visited in Sierra Leone. I would also like to thank Dr. C. Magbaily Fyle for his assistance and the affiliation with Fourah Bay College which he provided me during my stay.

<sup>3</sup> See John W. Johnson, *The Epic of Son-Jara* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) for more information about artistic specialization and verbal artistry in Mande society.

<sup>4</sup> See C. Magbaily Fyle, *Almamy Suluku of Sierra Leone c. 1820-1906* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1979) for an account of the Northern Province during the nineteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> See Yves Person, *Samori: Une Revolution Dyula* (Dakar, 1968) for an account of Samori and his exploits.

<sup>6</sup> See John W. Johnson, op. cit., for a background to the Sunjata (Son-Jara) epic.

<sup>7</sup> See Charles S. Bird and Martha B. Kendall, "The Mande Hero" (in *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Charles S. Bird; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980; pp. 13-26) for a background to the construction and praise of heroes in the Mande world.

<sup>8</sup> I gratefully acknowledge Yahya Daramy's help with translations.



## **Laura Boulton Graduate Fellowship Awarded to Marlena Frackowski**

The Archives of Traditional Music and the Laura Boulton Foundation are pleased to announce that Marlena Frackowski has been selected as the recipient of the first Laura Boulton Graduate Fellowship at the Archives. This fellowship was established to promote research on Laura Boulton's extensive collections of sound recordings, manuscripts, photographs and musical instruments from around the world, which are now housed at the Archives and at the Mathers Museum of World Cultures.

Professors Portia K. Maultsby and Ruth M. Stone, representing the Indiana University ethnomusicology program and Dr. John M. Ward, Professor Emeritus, Department of Music at Harvard University and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Laura Boulton Foundation, constituted the selection committee.

Ms. Frackowski is a fourth-year graduate student in folklore and ethnomusicology, with an M.A. in musicology from Warsaw University in Poland. Her research will focus on the European instruments in the Laura Boulton Collection.

## **Resound A Quarterly of the Archives of Traditional Music**

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