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Lee Nichols Visits Indiana University

by Mary Russell Bucknum

Journalist and author Lee Nichols recently visited the Indiana University campus to deliver the first installment of his gift to the University–taped interviews with eighty-three African authors recorded in the 1970s while working as a Special Projects Officer for the Voice of America. These interviews contain the raw material for a series of seventy-eight half-hour Voice of America broadcasts titled: "Conversations with African Writers." Nichols presented the 175 tapes of both original interviews and program broadcasts to the Archives of Traditional Music, where they will be catalogued and dubbed for public listening.

The collection contains a vast wealth of information on African literature, much of it original and otherwise available only in the Library of Congress. During the course of the interviews, each author discusses his purposes, inhibitions, and dilemmas, in the context of his own country's history, and, in most cases, the tone and inner workings of his writings. Ten of the eighty-three authors are women and thirty of them work in twenty-one African languages. Some authors have since died, among them: Okot p'Bitek of Uganda, Musa Galaal of Somalia, Mohammed Magzoub of Sudan, Albert Kayper-Mensah of Ghana, Abbie Gubegna of Ethiopia, Thomas Dekker of Sierra Leone, and Alhaji Abubakar Imam of Nigeria.

Nichols provides photographs, recording transcriptions and accompanying materials such as personal correspondence and news clippings for each interviewee. In addition to the above-mentioned Voice of America broadcast series, Nichols has published two books based on these interviews, *Conversations with African Writers* (Voice of America, 1981) and *African Writers at the Microphone* (Three Continents Press, 1984).

A journalist for nearly fifty years, Nichols worked for daily, black and labor newspapers, followed by seventeen years with United Press International. He was employed by the Voice of America in 1958, and originated the VOA's English-to-Africa service in 1963, directing it for ten years. Designated a Special Projects Officer in

1973, he made numerous recording trips to Africa, producing several documentary series before his retirement in 1985.

Leo Sarkisian, fellow VOA employee, accompanied Nichols on his trip to Bloomington. Sarkisian, also a writer and producer for the Voice of America, recently received a special American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP)-Deems Taylor citation for his show, "Music Time in Africa." Recruited into government service in 1964 by renowned journalist, Edward R. Murrow, Sarkisian has been referred to as "one of the VOA's most spirited cultural ambassadors." He has also deposited some of his own field tapes at the Archives of Traditional Music. Both Nichols and Sarkisian voiced their praise of the ATM as a substantial, historical collection and noted the reputation of the African Studies Program as factors in their decisions to deposit materials here. They also talked about the influence of the late Alan P. Merriam (I.U. Professor of Anthropology/ Ethnomusicology) in their professional careers. In a letter from Nichols following his visit to I.U. he remarked, "The first half-hour tape of my VOA 'Holiday Festival of African Arts' contains a piece by ...Merriam in which he talks about African music and presents several examples from his collection. I was deeply moved to revisit that program."

Voice of America policy originally prohibited any dissemination of overseas materials within the United States, but that policy has now been modified to permit such dissemination after twelve years. Nichols is pleased that his work, which was praised by African writers, media people and others, is now available to the citizens of the United States. "The material is now given to America to the extent that your archives are utilized," said Nichols. "I am happy to find a home for [the collection] and if it will be useful to somebody, I am more than happy."

Boulton Fellows at the Archives

by Gloria J. Gibson

This fall the Archives of Traditional Music is intimately involved with various activities associated with the Laura Boulton Collection. Working daily in the vault, Frank Gunderson, whose article appears in this issue, continues to sort and process the Laura Boulton papers. The Archives, with the assistance of the Teaching and Learning Technology Lab, has developed a prototype of an interactive CD ROM entitled, "The Straus Expedition: Instruments of West Africa," The multimedia teaching aid is based on Boulton's 1934 expedition. The CD ROM prototype was authored by Daniel Reed, the 1995-96 Boulton Junior Fellow. In addition, Laura Boulton Board member, Margarita Mazo and Board President Shirley Porter, visited the Archives on separate occasions. Certainly Laura Boulton would be very pleased that her life work continues to inspire critical research and boundless creativity.

By far the most intense research this fall is being conducted by the Laura Boulton Junior and Senior Fellows. The senior fellow is Dr. Simeon Asiama. He is presently serving as Senior Research Fellow and the Head of Music Section at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. He is also in charge of the Institute's Archive of Sound Recordings. The title of his present study is, "African Instrumental Symbolism: A Comparative Study." Professor Asiama arrived in late August and will remain at the archives until early January to complete his work.

In a recent interview, Dr. Asiama explained that he has always been interested in the study of music, both European and African. His pursuit of musical knowledge is both personal and