

FROM “SOUND” TO “SOUND AND AUDIOVISUAL”: HISTORY AND FUTURE OF IASA*Kurt Deggeller, IASA President 2002-2005***Abstract**

IASA emerged in 1969 from IAML, the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres. The interests of IAML's members largely focused on music as manuscript or score, and musical sound recordings were dealt with in the Record Library Committee. IASA was founded to consider additional types of sound recordings, including research and oral history. From the first years of IASA's existence, the question of the organisation's relationship to the moving image arose, represented by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF). But as early as 1979, a delegate from the United States also brought video into play. With independence from IAML in the late 1980s, an intensive discussion began about the future of IASA and the expansion of the scope of the association to include audiovisual documents. Finally in 1999, the constitution and the name of the association were adapted. The transformation process triggered by this name change is still underway today. It could prove to be an advantage for IASA because it opens possibilities of adaptation to the rapidly changing world of audiovisual production due to digitisation and online media.

Keywords: History of IASA, Future of IASA, audiovisual

Introduction

There is a commonplace that learning from history can help us to determine how to approach the future. To some extent, this article attempts to follow this line of thinking. IASA was founded in 1969 as a kind of spin-off of the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres (IAML). IAML was mainly interested in music collections, especially those in manuscript or printed form, but also in sound recordings. IAML had a Record Library Committee and a Subcommittee on Radio Archives, from which IASA emerged. The founding members of IASA were all also members of IAML; however, their interests went beyond music. They were interested in recordings from linguistic research, oral history and ethnography, and speech recordings from radio archives; so, they wanted an association with a broader scope. The founding institutions were mostly libraries and radio archives; specialised sound archives included the British Institute of Recorded Sound and the Nationaldiskoteket in Copenhagen. An important role was played by the Foundation for Film and Science in Utrecht and its representative, Rolf Schuurmsma, the first Secretary General of IASA.

Relation with Film Archives

During the first Council Meeting in Leipzig on 13 and 14 June 1970, cooperation with film archives was discussed for the first time:

Mr. Schuurmsma then communicated a short report about the close cooperation of film archives in the Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAPF) and the ties between sound archives like his own and film archives like the Dutch Filmmuseum and the State Film Archive of The Netherlands. Mr. Schuurmsma urged the necessity of some kind of relationship between IASA and the FIAPF or individual film archives in the future. In the discussion it became clear that there are great differences in the problems of sound and film (TV) archives in the represented countries and that it is very difficult to obtain close cooperation if necessary (“IASA Meeting Leipzig, June 13 and 15, 1970,” p. 19).

The issue of cooperation with film archives came up again at the 1973 Annual Meeting in London. In the minutes we can read:

5. Relation of IASA to International Film Archive Associations. The president asked the meeting for views on the possible closer co-operation of IASA with other international associations concerned with the preservation of records, whether aural, visual or written - such as the Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film and the International Federation of Library Associations. Mr. David Lance [Imperial War Museum, London] thought that IASA should first become a bigger Association before co-operating with, for instance, FIAF. Mr. Leavitt [Music Division, Library of Congress] asked how many members were interested in multi-media records; it is known, for instance, that many broadcasting archives are involved both with sound and film/video. Mr. Lotichius [Sound Archive of the Broadcasting Company of Northern Germany - Norddeutscher Rundfunk] said that in Germany the sound and film archives of the broadcasting organisations are separate, and relationship between them is quite loose. He asked whether the Constitution of IASA excluded visual archives. Mr. Leavitt said the Constitution of IASA does permit such co-operation (Article 11B). Mr. Eckersley [BBC Recording Services] said that it was his strong opinion that there was bound to be a move towards multi-media archives, and that IASA ought to keep closely in touch with this development (“5th Annual Meeting of IASA,” pp. 4-5).

In Europe, Sweden was a pioneer for the integration of sound and moving image in a specialised archive. Claes Cnattingius from the Swedish Broadcasting Company documented with articles in the *Phonographic Bulletin* from 1975 and 1976 the development which led to the legal deposit act for sound and moving image of 1979, and the foundation of the Archive for Sound and Image (Arkivet för Ljud och Bild) in the same year (Cnattingius, 1975; 1976).

But there were also voices against such an integration. Patrick Saul, director of the British Institute of Recorded Sound pleads for national sound archives and against the integration of the moving image. His main argument was that archiving the moving image is much more demanding and therefore sound would be neglected in such an institution (Saul, 1976). Rolf Schuurmsma (Foundation for Film and Science) argued in a short article against some of Saul’s arguments (Schuurmsma, 1976).

To finish the discussions of the seventies, an article on “Oral History: The Visual Argument” by Joel Garden from the University of California made an interesting point:

I appreciate David’s [David Lance, Chairman of the session] pointing out that in a sense I’m a pioneer, because I do have the feeling that in ten years I’ll come back to IASA—wherever it may be, perhaps even in the United States—and there’ll be a lot of video going on. A lot of you will have begun to concern yourselves with the care of video tapes with the same attentiveness you now observe for audio tapes and discs (Gardner, 1979, p. 8).

The “Future of IASA” debates

At the Vienna conference of 1988, the first organised by IASA without IAML, a session entitled “The Future of IASA” was on the programme. An important topic was the extension of IASA’s scope to “Sound and Audiovisual.” This was advocated above all by those institutions that had expanded their collecting area in the same direction, among them the Swedish Arkivet för Ljud och Bild, the Département de la Phonothèque et de l’Audiovisuel of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Österreichische Phonothek (even before it was renamed Österreichische Mediathek) and the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress.

Two of the main papers of the Vienna Conference were published in 1989 in the *Phonographic Bulletin* no. 53: Hans Bosma, former staff member of the Dutch Broadcasting Company, was in favour of an extension of IASA’s competence. However, he stressed that the structures of the Association needed to be strengthened mainly the Branches and Affiliated Organisations and the Committees to ensure better cohesion of the membership (Bosma 1989). And Rainer Hubert from Österreichische Phonothek insisted on a closer cooperation between IASA, FIAT/IFTA (International Federation of Television Archives) and FIAF with joint conferences, publications and committees (Hubert, 1989).

Opponents of the expansion were people close to the record collectors and discographers, such as the American professor Michael Biel, who strongly warned against a loss of identity in his article “IASA’s Focus on Sound - an Appeal to Retain our Goal” (Biel, 1992).

The decision of the 1992 General Assembly in Canberra that the expansion of IASA’s interests to audiovisual archives needed further discussion was obviously a surprise for the Board. Past President Helen Harrison wrote in her article “IASA Future and External Relations”: “Revised draft amendments to the Constitution and By-Laws were sent to the membership in July 1992 and, surprise surprise, in September in Canberra we were informed that not enough discussion and information had been given for members to make up their minds! How do you define *enough!*” (Harrison, 1993, p. 31)

In the same article Harrison gives an overview of the discussion on the topic on different levels including the Round Table on Audiovisual Records. The members of this group, FIAF, the International Association of Television Archives (FIAT/IFTA) and the audiovisual sections of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the International Council on Archives (ICA), were in favour of the extension plans of IASA. The main argument was that many smaller archives with audiovisual materials could not apply to join FIAT/IFTA or FIAF because of the membership conditions in the constitutions, and needed therefore another opportunity to be represented on an international level. A merger of IASA, FIAT/IFTA and FIAF to one big audiovisual organisation was considered impossible. However, common meetings on topics of mutual interest could be envisaged.

It took two more years until the 1995 General Assembly in Washington D.C. approved the constitutional amendment and the change of the IASA’s name to “International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives”- the acronym IASA remained unchanged. Helen Harrison was satisfied and wrote in her last letter as editor of the IASA Journal: “it does not make IASA any different, just more effective and even friendlier towards archivists” (Harrison, 1996, p. 2).

In the same article Helen Harrison mentioned the difficulty of describing the meaning of “audiovisual”:

I do not like the way AV is being confused with multimedia. To me multimedia is a tool fed by the audiovisual materials. There are no multimedia archives and what the outside world calls multimedia is only electronic documents - surrogate AV materials sometimes, mere alternatives to print in most instances. To identify AV for what it really is - not just a component of e-documents is a cause worth pursuing, and I hope that IASA will recognise this. Without a clear distinction we will find our lives complicated by substitutions. We must go back to the original and remember - there is only one master sound recording, one original film and one original video. These supply the e-documents and multimedia. Electronic documents are copies taken from so many sources they may be difficult to trace. They have little in common with the issues of archiving of audiovisual materials - only as convenient storage materials and these are still somewhat suspect (Harrison, 1996, p. 3).

The years following the expansion to sound and audiovisual

The decision of 1995 did not lead to any spectacular developments in IASA in the following years. In January 1999, the Board published a “Concept for the integration of audiovisual matters in IASA’s scope” in six points. The first point reads: “A definition of ‘audiovisual.’” In the comment to this point the Board writes that it wanted to adopt the definition Ray Edmondson gives in his *Philosophy of Audiovisual Archiving* (IASA Executive Board, 1999, p. 7). Edmondson’s definition is very pragmatic:

Audiovisual – ‘directed at the faculties of seeing and hearing’ – has gained increasing use as a convenient single word covering both moving images and recorded sounds of all kinds. With some variation in connotation, it is used in the titles of some archives and professional groupings in the field. It is the term adopted by UNESCO to draw together the separately originated fields of film, television, and sound archiving which have found increasing commonality through technological change (Edmondson, 2016, p. 20).

The other points in the IASA Board’s concept include identifying audiovisual competences within and outside IASA and encouraging work and publications in this area:

Moreover, we should find out in which AV areas (video, film, photo etc.) there is the largest backlog and demand within the membership with the aim to create e.g. project groups. This should be discussed with the chairpersons of the Committees, Branches and Affiliated Organisations during the joint part of the Board meeting (IASA Executive Board 1999, p. 7).

The most important committee of IASA was—and still is—the Technical Committee (TC). Dietrich Schüller, who has been a member of this committee from the beginning, writes in response to the question of how the expansion of IASA affected the work of the TC:

What I gather both from my recollection and from the papers is that the IASA TC was very early on open to an interest beyond sound, and was strongly sensitised to the chemical stability of audiovisual carriers through cooperation with the film archivists. I did not find a vote for an expansion of IASA in the direction of audiovisual in the TC minutes, certainly because there were no barriers for IASA technicians and there were many overarching issues that made expansion quite natural and desirable (Schüller, 2022).

Schüller cites as an important event in this development the Joint Technical Symposium of 1987 in Berlin, a meeting of the Technical Committees of FIAF, FIAT/IFTA and IASA.¹

Relationship with FIAT/IFTA

FIAT/IFTA was founded in 1977. On its website the reason why another association of audiovisual archives was needed is explained as follows:

The history of FIAT/IFTA begins in 1976, when the leaders of a small group of television archives together establish the need for collaboration and pooling of expertise in their specific domain. Most members know each other from the general framework provided by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), but that organisation doesn't hold a specific forum for their issues and concerns, and neither does FIAF (Fédération Internationale des Archives Film) or IASA (International Association of Sound Archives) (FIAT/IFTA, n.d.).

After the expansion of IASA's scope of activities towards audiovisual matters, one could have imagined that IASA and FIAT/IFTA would have found reasons for closer cooperation. In fact, joint annual conferences took place in 1994 in Berlin-Bogensee and in 1995 in Washington, D.C. However, there were only a few joint sessions, and the programs ran more in parallel. After the Washington meeting in 1995, no more joint conferences took place until the virtual conference hosted by the Irish broadcasting company RTÉ in Dublin in 2020.

But there were other occasions where IASA met with FIAF and FIAT/IFTA. There was the already-mentioned Joint Technical Symposium (JTS). It was first held in Stockholm in 1983, organised by FIAF and FIAT, and was limited to the preservation of film and video archives. In 1988 in Berlin, IASA was also present, and the theme was extended to audio documents. As the title indicates, during these events, which lasted several days, primarily technical problems of preserving film, video and audio documents were discussed. The JTS has been held regularly at intervals of about 4 years, for the last time in 2019 in Hilversum following the IASA annual conference.

1 *Archiving the Audio-Visual Heritage. A Joint Technical Symposium*. Ed. Eva Orbanz, Helen P. Harrison, Philippe Poncin, Henning Schou. Berlin, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, 1988. All the previous proceedings of the past Joint Technical Symposia are accessible at: <https://www.ccaaa.org/pages/news-and-activities/joint-technical-symposium.html>.

Furthermore, an annual meeting of the three associations took place within the framework of the UNESCO Roundtable on Audiovisual Records. In 2000 on the initiative of IASA the Roundtable was renamed and reorganized and became the Co-Ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (CCAAA). The accession of the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) and the Southeast Asia-Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association (SEAPAVAA) in 2002, the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) in 2007 and the Federation of Commercial Audiovisual Libraries (FOCAL) in 2011 substantially expanded the spectrum of CCAAA.

And the Future?

Why IASA, FIAT/IFTA, and FIAF did not move closer together after IASA’s expansion to audiovisual documents can be explained by the different focus of each association. Each of these three associations understands archiving and its goals in a different way: television archives are assets with a commercial value for reuse within or outside the broadcasting company to which it belongs. Film archives, as represented in FIAF, see themselves more as art collections—“film as the seventh art”—thus more as an art gallery or museum than as an archive. For IASA, the “audiovisual archive” has a broader meaning. It is not limited to a certain genre of content and is considered mainly from an ethical and technical perspective with a strong focus on research archives and national collections of audiovisual heritage.

The openness of IASA’s purpose and aim may prove to be an advantage in the future. With the flux of digital images and sounds, traditional television may sooner or later prove to be a media history episode, and film, as understood by many members of FIAF, a museum discipline. This is not meant negatively per se, but it shows that after 50 years the time has come to rethink the organizational structures of the international community of AV archives which mostly emerged and grew after the Second World War (FIAF, founded in 1932, is the exception).

In such a new setting, IASA could play a leading role, as it did when the CCAAA was founded, because of its open objectives. On the one hand, the aim is to preserve the analogue audiovisual cultural heritage and, if necessary, to transform it into digital form. On the other hand, it is about preserving digital images and sounds, providing access to them, and networking them in the universe of mobile cultural assets. This requires new cross-media platforms and new forms of cooperation.

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