

A guide to The Syliphone Archive

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In early 2016 the British Library made available to the public *The Syliphone Archive*, a large collection of Guinean music recorded between 1960 and 1990. At nearly 8,000 songs, the collection provides a comprehensive history of modern Guinean music, covering the early days of independence, the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s, to styles that were at the cutting edge of popular African music in the 1970s and beyond. Outside of the region of West Africa, Guinean music has largely been known through the Syliphone recordings originally released by the Guinean government on vinyl and since re-issued on compact discs. *The Syliphone Archive* presents the complete collection of the Syliphone label recordings in addition to over 7,000 songs recorded in the same studios using the same engineers and equipment. Thus, Guinea's top bands, musicians, troupes, choirs and ensembles are featured in the archive, and while some of the artists are well-known, there are many others whose fame and talent did not extend beyond the borders of West Africa through limited travel and recording opportunities. The purpose of this guide, therefore, is to suggest some entry points into this large collection of music, and I offer some personal choices and insights into the archive's significant and unique holdings.

The Syliphone Archive is essentially comprised of two sections: the complete collection of Syliphone vinyl discs consisting of 750 songs transferred to digital format; and a much larger collection (7000+ songs) of ¼" magnetic tape recordings, also digitised. It is easy to distinguish these two sections. All of the Syliphone vinyl recordings in the catalogue commence with the prefix Syliphone1, while all of the ¼" magnetic tape recordings commence with either Syliphone2, Syliphone3 or Syliphone4. It required three projects to archive the collection of tape recordings, hence the three catalogue numbers.

Orchestras: Early period (1961-1964)

An excellent place to commence a journey into the archive is with two of the best orchestras in Guinea. Orchestras, in the African sense, were large ensembles which typically played dance music in a bar or concert setting. In much the same fashion as popular jazz and Cuban style orchestras of the 1940s and 1950s, African orchestras featured a brass section of saxophone and trumpets (and occasionally trombones and clarinets) alongside a guitar section of up to four guitars, including bass, with rhythm provided by congas, timbales, and a western style drum kit. Vocalists and dancers, and in later years, an electric keyboard, complete the line-up, and each group usually featured a soloist, usually a lead guitarist or saxophonist. Shortly after independence, the Guinean government banned all private orchestras in a bold move intended to develop Guinean culture. The government replaced the private orchestras with their own state-sponsored groups, and the best musicians in the nation were called upon to serve in these new formations. Musicians such as the trumpeter Balla Onivogui, who was studying music at a conservatory in Dakar, Senegal, returned to Conakry and was enlisted into Guinea's newly formed national orchestra, the Syli Orchestre National. Also in the orchestra were musicians such as Kerfala "Grand Papa" Diabaté and Keletigui Traoré. Once the Syli Orchestre National was established, President Sékou Touré sent its musicians into rural Guinea where they trained young musicians in the regional orchestras that were being formed in the towns and cities. By the mid-1960s the Guinean government had successfully created a network of over 30 regional orchestras in addition to over 100 ballet troupes, choirs, and instrumental ensembles. It was an experiment in nation building, in cultural revitalisation, and *The Syliphone Archive* captures its finest music.

The first recordings by the Syli Orchestre National are catalogued as SyliPHONE3-248. They represent the earliest recordings of a Guinean orchestra in the archive and date to circa 1961. The influence of Cuban music in this early period is clearly represented through the claves and the strong presence of the *son* style. Amongst these recordings is one of the earliest known versions of “Djaraby”, performed as “Djarabi téba la mōma”, which features a Kerfala “Grand Papa” Diabaté solo on guitar and Keletigui Traoré concluding the piece with a saxophone solo. It is also wonderful to hear the orchestra fronted by two female soloists, Angeline Daffé and Fatou Tökhödi. While the Socialist government of Sékou Touré was a proponent of equality of the sexes, this was in scarce evidence in the orchestras. Invariably, Guinea’s orchestras were fronted by male vocalists and musicians, with the notable exception of the all-female Les Amazones de Guinée, who in their early days were known as the Formation Feminine Orchestre de la Gendarmerie Nationale.

The second important early orchestra is featured on a recording labelled “Orchestre Honore Coppet”, catalogue number SyliPHONE4-010. Born in Martinique, Honore Coppet was a successful clarinettist with several recordings to his name when he arrived in Conakry in 1954 at the invitation of the drummer, Jean Fanga. Together they would later play in the Syli Orchestre National. Coppet was an important member of the group and he trained many musicians, including Momo “Wandel” Soumah, the famed alto sax player with Keletigui et ses Tambourinis. Linké Condé, the guitarist with Keletigui et ses Tambourinis, appears on these recordings, as does Mamadi Kourouma (flute) and Djigui Touré (trumpet).

Recommended listening from archived SyliPHONE vinyl:

- Orchestre de la Paillote. Circa 1964. SyliPHONE1-003. [As with all examples, the catalogue number should be typed into the “Search” field at *The SyliPHONE Archive* page at the British Library Sounds website - <http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/SyliPHONE-record-label-collection>].
- Orchestre du Jardin de Guinée. Circa 1964. SyliPHONE1-004.
- Rythmes Africains. Conakry: Quinzaine Artistique 1965. 1965. SyliPHONE1-008.

Recommended listening from archived ¼” tape:

- The Syli Orchestre National. Circa 1961. SyliPHONE3-248
- Orchestre Honoré Coppet. 2 February 1963. SyliPHONE2-068.
- Formation Feminine Orchestre de la Gendarmerie Nationale. 8 November 1963. SyliPHONE4-382.
- Keletigui et ses Tambourinis. 1964. SyliPHONE4-010.
- Orchestre de la Paillote. 22 February 1963. SyliPHONE2-058.
- Orchestre de la Paillote. 30 December 1963. SyliPHONE4-739.
- Kébendo Jazz and Niandan Jazz. 31 August 1964. SyliPHONE2-052.
- Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine. November 1964. SyliPHONE4-734 and SyliPHONE2-067.
- Bembeya Jazz (orchestra of Beyla). “Ruphine missive”. Circa 1966. SyliPHONE4-218-10.

Orchestras: Middle period (1967-1970)

By the mid-1960s, Guinea’s experiment with nation building through music was in full swing, pun intended. No less than 35 regional orchestras had been established and many had recorded at the Radio Télévision Guinée studios, then known as “The voix de la révolution”. Some of the regional orchestras, such as Bembeya Jazz, had become nationalised, and Guinea would eventually boast six national orchestras to complement their regional counterparts. The recordings of these orchestra

capture the development of Guinea's policy of *Authenticité*, the name given to the campaign which underpinned the nationalisation of culture during the Sékou Touré years (1958-1984). *Authenticité* became Guinea's official cultural policy and it tasked the state's musicians with presenting modernised versions of the traditional songs of their regions. Thus, music that was once played on the *kora* and *balafon* was now played on the electric guitar and saxophone, so as to meet the sensibilities of a modern nation while retaining the authenticity of the original. The Guinean government's firm control over music and artistic production took a dramatic step in 1968 when a Cultural Revolution was launched, and with it the Syliphone recording label. Guinea's musicians were now the official voice of the nation, and hence their songs promoted government policy and programs. Typical song themes informed the public of agricultural developments, of 3 Year Plans, or of the benefits of flying with Air Guinée, or they encouraged all to work for the good of the nation. There are also numerous songs which praise Sékou Touré and his political party, the PDG. The orchestras in this period display their credentials as the good citizens of a modern Socialist state, attacking imperialism and advocating the one-party system while providing dance grooves to their eager audiences. Thanks to the Syliphone vinyl recordings, which were released from circa 1966, Guinean music was also becoming a major influence in the West African region.

Recommended listening from archived Syliphone vinyl:

- Bembeya Jazz National. "Regard sur le passé". 1969. Syliphone1-013.
- Kouyaté Sory Kandia with Keletigui et ses Tambourinis. 1970. Syliphone1-015-05 to Syliphone1-015-08.
- "Disque souvenir du Premier Festival National de la Culture. Conakry - du 9 au 27 mars 1970. Recueil de orchestres modernes". 1970. Syliphone-1-021.
- "Guinée an X. Orchestres Nationaux. Grand tierce musical". 1968. Syliphone1-011.
- Bembeya Jazz National. "Sabor de guajira". Circa 1968. Syliphone1-085-2.
- Keletigui et ses Tambourinis. "Cigarettes allumettes". Circa 1968. Syliphone1-084-02.

Recommended listening from archived ¼" tape:

- Horoya Band National. 27 March 1968. Syliphone2-017.
- Balla et ses Balladins. 1 January 1969. Syliphone2-049.
- Bafing Jazz (Orchestra of Mamou). 27 March 1968. Syliphone2-024.
- Kakilambé Jazz (Orchestra of Conakry II). 9 February 1968. Syliphone2-003.
- Manden Könö (Orchestra of Siguiri). 2 June 1968. Syliphone2-004.
- Djoliba Jazz (Orchestra of Siguiri). 27 September 1968. Syliphone2-013.
- Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine - 2ème formation. 3 July 1969. Syliphone2-062.
- Kaloum Star (Orchestra of Conakry I). 24 April 1970. Syliphone2-047.
- Bembeya Jazz National. "Bembeyako". Circa 1966. Syliphone3-130-1.
- Keletigui et ses Tambourinis. "Moi ça ma fout". 25-Jun-70. Syliphone2-055-02.

Orchestras: Late period (1970s onwards)

If the 1960s was the decade of experimenting with a fusion of Cuban, jazz and local African musical styles, the 1970s was the decade where Guinean music came of age. Groups such as Bembeya Jazz National were at their creative peak, releasing cutting-edge material that was widely acclaimed. Guinean orchestras were touring Africa, Europe and the USA, and what commenced as a regional policy and style had now gained an international focus. Indeed, *Authenticité* had become a catchphrase, with African leaders embracing its principles and adapting it to suit local needs. Guinea's most famous singer, Kouyaté Sory Kandia, was a major innovator, propelling the traditional

epics of the *griots* into an orchestra setting (that of Keletigui et ses Tambourinis), a recording which earned the *Grand Prix du Disc* award from the Académie Charles Cros. Young groups like Camayenne Sofa, Syli Authentic, and the Quintette Guinéenne provided hotbeds of creativity, expanding their influences to include music from Guinea's forest regions alongside Congolese *soukous* and the funk of James Brown. Miriam Makeba, a resident of Guinea since 1968, had integrated herself fully into the Guinean music scene and released many recordings sung in Guinean languages and backed by local musicians. The decade of the 1970s placed no limits on musical boundaries as new styles of African popular music were being forged.

Recommended listening from archived Syliphone vinyl:

- Bembeya Jazz National. "Memoire à Aboubacar Demba Camara". 1973. Syliphone1-047.
- Bembeya Jazz National. "Authenticite 73". 1973. Syliphone1-042.
- Syli Authentic (orchestra of Conakry III). Circa 1976. "Andrée", "Fabara". Syliphone1-061-01, Syliphone1-061-05.
- Quintette Guinéenne. "Massané Cissé". 1975. Syliphone1-058-02.
- Kouyaté Sory Kandia and Keletigui et ses Tambourinis. 1971. Syliphone1-020.
- Miriam Makeba. "La Guinée guiné". Circa 1971. Syliphone1-118-01.
- Balla et ses Balladins. "Objectif perfection". Circa 1979. Syliphone1-079.
- Discothèque 74. 1974. Syliphone1-052.

Recommended listening from archived ¼" tape:

- Horoya Band National. "Wara". Circa 1973. Syliphone2-093-08.
- Kébendo Jazz (orchestra of Gueckédou). 8 June 1971. Syliphone4-376.
- Kébendo Jazz (orchestra of Gueckédou). "Toubabalou kaba". Circa 1971. Syliphone4-355-11.
- Kébendo Jazz (orchestra of Gueckédou). "Soumba". Circa 1971. Syliphone2-050-01.
- Bembeya Jazz National. "Ballaké". In concert, circa 1971. Syliphone2-091-01.
- Bembeya Jazz National. "Ala laké". In concert, 1972. Syliphone4-169-10.
- Sankaran Echo (orchestra of the Institut Valéry Giscard d'Estaing de Faranah). "Tuwan". 14 September 1980. Syliphone4-431-04.
- Syli Authentic (orchestra of Conakry III). 11 November 1974. Syliphone3-194.
- Camayenne Sextet. 27 April 1974. Syliphone4-389.
- Niandan Jazz (orchestra of Kissidougou). "Soundiata", "Artiste Sara". 1 December 1976. Syliphone4-193-09, Syliphone4-193-10.
- Kaloum Star (orchestra of Conakry I). 3 November 1972. Syliphone4-357.
- Dirou Band (orchestra of Kindia). "Tamaba magni". Circa 1978. Syliphone2-099-05.

Orchestras and smaller groups: Post Sékou Touré (1984+)

President Sékou Touré died suddenly in 1984, and a week after his death a military coup had installed a new government. The *Authenticité* program was abolished and the system of state-sponsorship abandoned. Guinea's orchestras were left to fend for themselves, and most did not survive. The economies of scale meant that smaller groups evolved, such as Atlantic Mélodie, who featured musicians from two former regional orchestras, and Super Flambeau, who evolved from the Super Boiro Band. University-based groups, such as Les Fils du Raï, came to the fore, and trios and small acoustic groups were now also competing in a free-market, as a new generation set forth. Musicians from marginalised ethnic groups, such as the Fulbé, who had been targeted by the former President, were also being recorded and finding great success on the Guinean market. It was a new era for Guinean musicians, who had been accorded a freedom not known since the early 1960s.

Recommended listening:

- Saran Diabaté. "Denikelem". Circa 1986. SyliPHONE4-481-02.
- Atlantic Mélodie. "Khanouya", "Mumba". Circa 1988. SyliPHONE4-792-07, SyliPHONE4-792-08.
- Sona Kouyaté. "Woende". 17 January 1990. SyliPHONE4-786-02.
- Les Fils du Raïs. 15 March 1990. SyliPHONE4-543.
- Doura Barry. Circa 1988. "Les filles de mon pays", "Grotto". SyliPHONE4-208-01, SyliPHONE4-208-02.
- Sergent Ourékaba. [Also known as Sarsan Ouré Kaba]. Circa 1980. SyliPHONE4-755.
- Group de 3. 16 January 1991. SyliPHONE4-495.
- Jeanne Macauley. 8 July 1987. SyliPHONE4-615.
- Koubia Jazz de Bantiguel Melikansa. 25 June 1992. SyliPHONE4-588.
- Les Messagers du Niger. 21 October 1986. SyliPHONE3-188.
- Groupe Macky Sow accompagné par Jean Paul Milimono. Circa 1990. SyliPHONE4-737.

Ensembles and Choirs

During the Sékou Touré years many different kinds of musical groups were sponsored by the state. Traditional music ensembles and choirs, for example, were found in many local neighbourhoods and small towns, where success could raise them to the sub-regional or regional level. Guinea's finest exponents of traditional music were elevated to be members of the national ensembles and choirs. Singers such as Kadé Diawara, Mama Kanté and Kouyaté Sory Kandia led these large ensembles with their powerful voices. Of all Guinea's groups, however, none were more successful than Les Ballets Africains, with *The SyliPHONE archive* presenting a wealth of their previously unreleased material.

Recommended listening from archived SyliPHONE vinyl:

- L'Ensemble Instrumental et Choral de la Radio-diffusion Nationale. "Victoire à la révolution". 1971. SyliPHONE1-032-01.
- "Sons et rythmes de Guinée. Avec les Ballets Africains". 1970. SyliPHONE1-014.
- Kouyaté Sory Kandia with Ensemble National Djoliba. 1970. SyliPHONE1-015-01 to SyliPHONE1-015-04.
- Chœur 71 de Boffa "Yahadi Gere" and "Muna fandyi". 1971. SyliPHONE1-031-02 and SyliPHONE1-031-03.

Recommended listening from archived ¼" tape:

- Ensemble Instrumental et Choral de la Radiodiffusion Nationale. 18 April 1967. SyliPHONE4-463.
- Mama Kanté avec l'Ensemble Instrumental de Kissidougou. 16 March 1970. SyliPHONE4-251-10 to SyliPHONE4-251-14.
- Kouyaté Sory Kandia with Ensemble National Djoliba. "P.D.G. à Alger". Circa 1969. SyliPHONE4-252-12.
- Chœur de Conakry II. "Prêt pour la Révolution". No date. SyliPHONE4-318-02.
- Chœur de Koundara. "Révolution Culturelle Socialiste". No date. SyliPHONE4-350-01.
- Ensemble Instrumental et Choral de la Radiodiffusion Nationale. 18 April 1967. SyliPHONE 4-463.
- Ensemble Instrumental de Labé. 19 March 1970. SyliPHONE4-583-09 to SyliPHONE4-583-14.
- Les Ballets Africains. 29 January 1969. SyliPHONE4-624.
- Ballets Djoliba National. 1970. SyliPHONE4-593.

Traditional music

The archive contains several thousand songs which present examples of Guinean “folklore”, a term used to describe many of the original recordings. While there is a great emphasis on the music of the Malinké, and in particular that of the *griots*, their traditional bards, over 20 other language groups are represented. The Malinké recordings present some of the finest exponents of the Mandé style, including unreleased recordings by Kouyaté Sory Kandia, Kadé Diawara and M’Bady Kouyaté. The Fulbé language group, Guinea’s largest, are also well represented in the archive, which contrasts to the paucity of recordings of their music released by Syliphone on vinyl. The Fulbé music is particularly noteworthy material. The music of the Susu, Guéré, Manon, Onëyan, Toma and Kissi are also in evidence, in addition to recordings in the following languages: Baga, Bassari, Djakanke, Djallonké, Konianka, Kônö, Kpèlè, Landouma, Lélé, Lokko, Sankaran, Toma-Manian, and Wamey. The archive presents a very rich selection of material for ethnographic research.

Recommended listening from Syliphone vinyl:

- Kouyaté Sory Kandia. “L’épopée du Mandingue”. 1973. Syliphone1-039, Syliphone1-040, Syliphone1-041.
- Virtuoses Diabaté. “La nouvelle mariée”. Circa 1976. Syliphone1-057.
- Kadé Diawara. “L’archange du Manding”. Circa 1977. Syliphone1-066.
- Les Virtuoses Diabaté. “Solos de guitares avec Papa et Sékou Diabaté”. 1971. Syliphone1-026-06.
- Demba Camara et Son Groupe. “Exhumation folklorique”. 1971. Syliphone1-026-07.

Recommended listening from ¼” tape:

- Kouyaté Sory Kandia. “Sara”. Circa 1973. Syliphone3-042-03.
- Kouyaté Sory Kandia. “Djoliba”. Circa 1973. Syliphone3-167-03.
- Kouyaté Sory Kandia. “N’na”. 13 October 1963. Syliphone4-129-04.
- Elhadj Oumar Camara dit Moryfindian Diabaté de la Troupe Théâtrale de Kankan. 5 March 1982. Syliphone4-573-01.
- 9 versions of Djanjon. “La lutte du P.D.G. à travers les chants populaires”. Syliphone3-233-02-Syliphone3-233-10.
- M’Bady Kouyaté. No date. Syliphone4-322.
- Farba Tela. Circa 1978. Syliphone4-295.
- Fodé Conté et La Playa. No date. Syliphone4-005.
- Ilou Dyôhère. Syliphone4-021. 12 October 1987.
- Sory Lariya Bah. 27 April 1990. Syliphone4-599.
- Binta Laaly Sow. No date. Syliphone3-043-01 to Syliphone3-043-09.
- Binta Laaly Saran. No date. Syliphone4-221.
- Kadé Diawara. Includes an interview. 25 September 1975. Syliphone3-229.
- Bangaly Traoré. “Chants de chasseurs”. 10 march 1970. Syliphone3-238.
- Djigui Diabaté. “Solos de balafon”. 9 February 1971. Syliphone3-211.
- Djibril Doumbouya. “Solos de koni”. No date. Syliphone3-183.
- Lamine Diabaté. “Solo de konni”. 6 April 1976. Syliphone4-558.

Other recordings of interest

The archive contains some works that are difficult to categorise, for example the poetry of President Sékou Touré set to music. There are also recordings of radio broadcasts which focus on particular themes and events, such as the announcements following the Portuguese invasion of 22 November

1970, or which present an hour of revolutionary songs. Kemo Kouyaté, the rhythm guitarist from the Quintette Guinéenne, recorded numerous instrumental pieces on a zither (Fr: *citharé*), which are definitely *avant-garde*. The recordings by the historian/musician Emile Tompapa, the “Airs populaires de lutte du PDG de 1947 à 1958, de 1958 à nos jours”, are performed on a Hammond organ, complete with programmed rhythms. Guinea’s renowned orchestra, Bembeya Jazz National, present an evening of dance music which features early Guinean orchestras such as the Orchestre de la Paillote, recordings that do not exist elsewhere in the archive and which are yet to be fully identified. Of particular note are the concerts, where orchestras such as Keletigui et ses Tambourinis presented expansive orchestral arrangements of traditional epic narratives and stories, a first for African music.

Recommended listening from Syliphone vinyl:

- Ensemble Instrumental National. “Extraits des Poèmes Militants”. [Poetry of President Sékou Touré]. 1971. Syliphone1-016-01.
- Édition spécial de la régie syliphone. Commémorant le 1er anniversaire de la victoire du peuple de Guinée sur l’impérialisme international. 22 Novembre 1970. 1971. Syliphone1-029.

Recommended listening from ¼” tape:

- “Poemes militants”. [Poetry of President Sékou Touré]. 14 November 1983. Syliphone3-162.
- “Vieux airs chansons Guinéennes avec commentaire par Katy Emmanuel. 1958 – 1964”. No date. Syliphone3-270.
- “Chants révolutionnaires. Commentaires – Emmanuel Katty”. 21 May 1969. Syliphone3-185.
- “Chansons révolutionnaires sur RDA”. 7 April 1982. Syliphone4-619.
- “Chants populaire de souveraineté”. No date. Syliphone2-083.
- “La lutte du P.D.G. à travers le chants populaires”. No date. Syliphone4-336.
- Emile Tompapa. “Airs populaires de lutte du PDG de 1947 à 1958, de 1958 à nos jours”. 24 June 1981. Syliphone4-276.
- Kémo Kouyaté. “Solo de guitar et citare”. 10 May 1977. Syliphone3-091.
- “Soirée dansante avec Bembeya Jazz à la plage pes”. No date. Syliphone3-192.
- Balla et ses Balladins. “Concert – Révolution Guinéenne”. 23 May 1969. Syliphone4-454-01.
- Keletigui et ses Tambourinis. “Concert Soundiata”. 13 November 1978. Syliphone3-264-01.
- Syli Orchestre National (Keletigui). “Concert”. 2 August 1978. Syliphone4-352-01.
- Ensemble Instrumental et Choral de la Voix de la Révolution [with Kouyaté Sory Kandia]. “Concert”. 16 March 1973. Syliphone3-269-1.

Resources

For further information:

- *Syliphone record label recordings from Guinea*. British Library Sounds – <http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Syliphone-record-label-collection>).
- *Syliphone record label archive from Guinea*. British Library blog – <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/endangeredarchives/2016/01/syliphone-collection-guinea-sounds.html>.
- *The Syliphone catalogue* (an excel spreadsheet of the archive) – http://www.radioafrica.com.au/RTG_complete_catalogue.xls.
- *The Syliphone catalogue* (vinyl releases only) – <http://www.radioafrica.com.au/Discographies/Syliphone.html>.

- “Music for a revolution: The sound archives of Radio Télévision Guinée”, in *From dust to digital: Ten years of the Endangered Archives Programme*, Maja Kominko (ed). Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015, pp. 547-586 – <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/resources/9781783740628/17.Counsel.pdf>
- *The Radio Télévision Guinée sound archive* (including updates to the catalogue) – http://www.radioafrica.com.au/RTG_catalogue.html.
- *Guinean orchestras of the 1st Republic* – <http://www.radioafrica.com.au/Discographies/Origin.html>.
- *Post-syli*. [An appraisal of the archive at the blog Worldservice]. <http://wrldsrv.blogspot.com.au/>.