Afropop Worldwide: http://www.afropop.org
Electric Jive: http://electricjive.blogspot.com.au

Reviewed by: Jez Collins, Birmingham City University, England
Jez.collins@bcu.ac.uk

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Africa, befitting a continent made up of fifty-five countries, has a rich, diverse and bewildering array of music styles and cultures; from Algerian Rai in the North of the continent to South African township jive in the South. Each individual country has its own set of distinctive musical cultures that in turn has created an incredible legacy of musical activity and materials that in some cases have reached global prominence and left a long-lasting influence on popular music. However, much of the music associated with Africa and its related ephemera, what Marion Leonard calls 'the material objects' (2007) of popular music, have been lost or are at-risk of being lost, forever. In response to this a number of individuals, communities and organisations have taken it upon themselves to come together in order to preserve, share and celebrate African (and other) musical heritage and culture through the employment of digital tools in online platforms (See Baker & Collins 2015; Collins & Carter 2015; Collins 2015).

These projects and the motivation behind their creation belong, I suggest, to what the scholar Andrew Flinn describes as an 'activist practice' (2011: 10) approach to archiving and history-making by 'independent and community-led archives'. Flinn acknowledges the complexities and variety of practices, methods and approaches to the preservation and archiving of community histories and heritage and suggests there is a distinction between projects that are 'primarily motivated by the desire to celebrate and recover every voice' and those that seek to go further by 'exploring areas of difficulty and complexity in the group's or community's history, histories that might challenge the community as well as reinforce any preconceptions about identity' (2011: 10).

The sites under review here, Afropop Worldwide and Electric Jive, lend themselves to Flinn's idea of activist practices but I suggest blur the boundaries of Flinn's distinction between projects that 'celebrate' and those that 'challenge' hidden or under-represented histories. In this instance, African music and musicians.

Afropop Worldwide[1] describes itself as "…a Peabody award winning radio program and online magazine dedicated to music from Africa and the African Diaspora." that seeks to "… increase the profile of African and African diaspora music worldwide and to see that benefits from this increased profile go back to artists, music industry professionals, and the countries that produce the music."[2] Launched in 1988 by the American-based multimedia news organization and radio program producer National

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[1] References to this website's content are listed as footnotes, whilst references to other sources appear in the text and in the reference list.
[2] Afropop website, About: http://www.afropop.org/about/ (accessed 6 January 2016)

Public Radio, Afropop now airs on Public Radio International (PRI) as a weekly series to over 90 stations in the U.S., as well as stations in Europe and Africa. It is produced by the Brooklyn-based non-profit organisation World Music Productions and employs a number of staff and has a board consisting of African musicians such as Angelique Kidjo and Youssou N'Dour.[3]

Early on in its inception the Afropop founders had the foresight to think about the long-term future of the content they were producing and starting to accumulate and so began to archive their collection of interviews, features, photos, reviews and artist profiles. This they claim is central to Afropop's continuing strategic development "…as it harnesses the power of what we have done, and allows us to integrate past work with new research to support new projects."[4] This approach to the mid to long-term archiving and preservation of their media production materials is especially encouraging for scholars and those interested in learning more about African music, radio and culture, currently and for future generations.

The programmes themselves, each fifty-nine minutes long, are embedded on the site using the Soundcloud platform. Whilst writing this review I'm listening to the *The Immortal '70s* show hosted by Georges Collinet who takes the listener on a trip through 70s music from across the continent. Collinet is supremely knowledgeable about African music and a wonderful host of the shows, and provides the right balance between being passionate and informative about his subject but never overpowering the music he is talking about and playing. Accompanying the shows are hyperlinks to the countries the music originates from and the artists whose music is being featured, allowing the listener to move around the site and discover more about the music and musicians. There is also an element of interactivity on the site for users who wish to curate their own playlists of the broadcast shows.

Other programmes highlight aspects of the African diaspora and the transnationalism of its music and culture. Whilst some subject matters may repeat oft told stories of African music, Afropop Worldwide does uncover interesting and hidden histories that would otherwise remain untold. Programmes on topics such as the new sounds of Sao Paulo in Brasil, music, politics and spirituality in Haiti and the African sounds of the Indian sub-continent, seek to entertain and educate the audience.

Despite its relative longevity, Afropop Worldwide still relies on funding from grant giving agencies to undertake its work and calls on the community to donate money to enable it to continue with activities including the Hip Deep series on music and conflict resolution, website upgrades and advancing their archive project to digitise their at-risk unique 30 year old collection of materials.[5] This appeal serves to highlight the precarious nature of the work undertaken by Afropop Worldwide, despite the appearance of it being a relatively stable organisation, and the potential risk of the loss of the valuable historical resources they have accumulated during their existence.

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid

[5] Afropop Worldwide website: http://www.afropop.org/donate/ (Accessed 6 January 2016

Such issues are common for other online independent and community-led music history, heritage and archive practitioners, including the second website to be reviewed here, Electric Jive.

The Electric Jive website was launched in 2009 by its four founders and utilises the Blogger platform. Whilst broadly sharing the same aims and objectives of Afropop Worldwide – that is, the preservation, celebration and promotion of African musical culture –, Electric Jive takes a more overtly political stance about their work. As the founders state on the Electric Jive home page:

> We collect vinyl and African sounds for the love of music - not profit. Africa is blessed with a heritage of music that must be passed on and appreciated again and again. We focus on out of print South African, and other African music that is very difficult to find. Requests for that long-lost recording are invited - who knows, someone may have it available.[6]

This approach, despite the assertion that it this is a strictly non-profit endeavour and only out of print material is posted, leaves the materials posted on Electric Jive facing a precarious and fragile future. Well-documented copyright infringement cases brought by the media and music industries such as the closure of Megaupload and the ongoing action against founder Kim Dotcom (Pelosky, 2012) has resulted in the closure of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other similar sites and the loss of 'out of print' music they made available for their communities. It is not only the music that is lost or at-risk however. So too are the communities, and their accumulated knowledge and artefects – liner notes, photographs, posters and other related musical heritage materials – that form around sites such as Electric Jive.

The founders of Electric Jive digitise and stream albums and make them available to download alongside extensive explanatory notes about the artists and albums and provide hi-res scans of the sleeves. Such actions elicit a developing narrative from the community who respond with comments. While these are often in the nature of simple acknowledgements for the Electric Jive curators' efforts other posters offer discussions on the meanings of this music in their personal histories and how music offers a means of reconnecting with 'lost' or neglected artefacts with great personal significance. Some users also provide further albums for the community to discover and share.

An example of the type of material posted to Electric Jive is the album *Sathima sings for Ruth (Memorial Concert for Ruth First, Maputo 20 August 1982)*[7]. Ruth First was one of the defendants in the Treason Trial of 1956-1961, and a leading anti-apartheid activist and key figure in the Congress Alliance. On 17 August 1982, Ruth was killed by a letter bomb sent to her office on the campus of the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane by South African security agents. After her death there were a number of memorial concerts and a gala dedicated to her memory. This recording captures that event with speeches, spoken word and the jazz pianist Abdullah Ibrahim's rendition of the militant anthem 'South African Sunshine/Thula Dubula'. It is a work of extraordinary beauty and anger that serves as an historical document of a specific

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[6] Electric Jive website, http://electricjive.blogspot.co.uk (Accessed 6 January 2016)
[7] Ibid

moment in South Africa's history and is typical of the materials posted by activist archivists who seek to preserve and make available their musical heritage and culture.

Although Afropop Worldwide and Electric Jive take different approaches to their work they share similar aims and objectives; the preservation and celebration of African music, heritage and culture. In part their actions are driven by the failure of mainstream organisations, both public and commercial, to actively represent and reflect the histories and stories of African music. It is in their reaction to this omission that Afropop Worldwide and Electro Jive (and many others) are participating in activist archiving practices that Flinn describes in his work (2011). However, Flinn's separation of projects between those who 'celebrate' and those that 'challenge' would appear to be more complex when looking in more detail at Afropop Worldwide and Electric Jive's practices.

Both appeal to their communities to sustain their respective archives and simultaneously celebrate under-represented individual and communal histories and heritage and challenge notions of identity, representation and ownership of whose history is told and by whom. Afropop Worldwide are engaged in a long-term campaign to educate and inform listeners of the far-reaching global influence African musicians have had on popular music by producing and highlighting alternate histories that challenge dominant narratives of African music history. Alongside this they actively fundraise in support of their archival work in order to safeguard their own substantial collection of historical materials for future generations. Electro Jive appears more interested in making available the 'lost' or 'commercially unavailable' (South) African music: an aspect of African heritage they state must be passed on 'again and again'. Electric Jive faces the possibility of legal action being taken against them by rights holders resulting in the loss of materials (including user comments, photos, liner notes and other artefacts) from the site and potentially lost forever for future generations who may wish to study and learn about South African music and culture. While the rights holders and the law might disagree vehemently, the community, for whom it has primarily personal and collective meaning as a cultural, rather than an economic object, claim it as their heritage by their actions.

Afropop Worldwide and Electric Jive can be understood as self-authorised sites of popular music heritage (Roberts & Cohen 2013) and whilst they have been operating for some time (twenty-eight and seven years respectively) like other independent and community-led archives they face challenges to their long-term sustainability. As Flinn (2011: 13-14) has written, at the heart of these challenges is "the question of access to resources (financial, human, physical, skills, and expertise) and how a lack of resources hinders the archive's growth and ability to develop in the future". Whilst there has been a move towards more beneficially mutual partnerships and collaborations between independent and community-led archives and the mainstream archive and heritage sector, popular music archives, particularly those working in the online environment, remain, on the whole, under-resourced, fragmented and working in isolation with little interest in their efforts from the wider commercial music industries.

The work of individuals, communities and organisations such as Afropop Worldwide and Electric Jive play a vital role in the preservation and archiving of popular music. In providing a space for the lost and hidden voices of African music, in the sharing of

vernacular knowledge and in the desire to educate and introduce users to a deeper and broader understanding of African culture, Afropop Worldwide and Electric Jive are much more than mere online music websites.

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Electronic Resources

Afropop Worldwide http://www.afropop.org
Electric Jive http://electricjive.blogspot.com.au
NPR: http://npr.org
Public Radio International: http://www.pri.org