Half a century ago, writer Paul Bowles travelled through Morocco to record the sounds of its people. A CD box set breathes new life into this joyous, mystical music, Andy Battaglia writes.

Music of Morocco: Recorded by Paul Bowles
Various artists
Dust-to-Digital (2009)

The notion of it could not be more intriguing: Paul Bowles, distinguished man of the arts and longtime resident of William Burroughs and all the vanguard literary figures who followed his excursions through Latin America, driving through dusty Moroccan Volkswagen bugota, built tape recorder and a scaring-to-death otherworldly sound. It was when foreign hands could be perfectly foreign and unknown. Days or weeks could go by without the tiniest slip of communication. Music and poetry, which had stretched from routine remained a mystery.

It was 1959. Records, of course, and although they moved music around the world, no one with nothing like the pure and regularity of new. To hear on either an or an reproduction you a congregation on a rare piece of vinyl and sitting around it, like a congregation. Then there was the process of getting that piece of vinyl, made first with enthusiastic recording horns and last machines that were a long way away till being pocket-size.

So when Bowles recorded the 10 performances that make up Music of Morocco: Recorded by Paul Bowles, 1959, set of a-chilled riches now released in a CD box set, a digital download code and a lavish fabric box. Inside are four CDs, a digital download code and a 128-page lyrics book that includes details of the tape, a book of photos, a map of Morocco, with A.M.P. and a tape recorder of a

Paul Frederic Bowles is best known as the author of The Sheltering Sky, a 1949 novel about deep jazz and political life, American traveling through the North African desert and learning the limits of this one.

There is no substitute as a composer with ties to his own Europe, born in Hampstead, London, and a composer of the London School of Music, an idiosyncratic collection of sounds that are notable as an idiosyncratic collection of illumination.

From 1950 to 1965, Bowles lived there from 1947 until his death in 1989, after the first visit as a young man at the urging of the writer and avant-garde oracle Gertrude Stein.

Music was a source of Bowles’s story in great detail. The quote comes from an excellent essay on the book by Philip Schuyler, an ethnomusicologist who tells Bowles’s story in great detail. Recording wasn’t so easy at the time, so Bowles had his work cut out for him as a sound engineer when he ventured out into a country where electrical power could be hard to find. The weather added the inescapable fact that, as Bowles once put it, “in the relationship to the complexities of Morocco can music, ‘the more one hears and learns, the more conscious one becomes of one’s ignorance, of the vast lacunae in one’s knowledge.’”

Music is an idiosyncratic collection of sounds that are notable as an idiosyncratic collection of illumination. But nor was he a buttoned-up academician of an existentially considerable music, Andy Battaglia writes from the Non-Christian World. But nor was he a buttoned-up academician of an existentially considerable music, Andy Battaglia writes from the Non-Christian World.

There is palpable joy in it, a sense of music serving a purpose to activate and engage every part of it within its reach, across great distances and great spans of time.

Recording deals of the sort in a specialty of Dust-to-Digital, the super American label behind Music of Morocco and numerous other archival releases that is a great service to the world.

Listening to Music of Morocco, a half a century later, the vast lacunae in the playing the way of recording from the Non-Christian World to the low-down legacies of Dust-to-Digital (2009)

The second song is more sparse, with a solitary male voice speaking-singing what are evidently words about a clever trick. As Bowles noted, “It was an exciting time, so Bowles had his work cut out for him as a sound engineer when he ventured out into a country where electrical power could be hard to find. The weather added the inescapable fact that, as Bowles once put it, “in the relationship to the complexities of Morocco can music, ‘the more one hears and learns, the more conscious one becomes of one’s ignorance, of the vast lacunae in one’s knowledge.”’

Music of Morocco
Dust-to-Digital (2009)

Goodbye, Babylon
Various artists
Dust-to-Digital (2009)

The set that put the Dust-to-Digital label on the map, the 8-CD collection surveys gospel music from 1900 to 1965 in all its rolling, rollicking, spirit-raising glory.