

Folklife Today

May 2020: What's Inspiring the American Folklife Center Staff During the Virus Crisis

Announcer (00:01):

From the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

[Bill Stepp Plays Bonaparte's Retreat]

John Fenn (00:25):

Welcome to Folklife today. I'm John Fenn, the head of research and programs at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. And normally this is where I'd say I'm here with Stephen Winick, the Center's writer and editor and the creator of the *Folklife Today* blog. But I'm not actually with him.

Stephen Winick (00:41):

That's right. John and I are only together in virtual online space and that's because the Library of Congress is closed to the public as we record this, employees are working from home, and on top of that, John and I live in Maryland, which is under a stay at home order as we record, so we can't be in the same room. And that means that you might very well hear some ambient sounds of our homes and the homes of our guests during this podcast episode.

John Fenn (01:06):

Indeed, that's part of what we're all experiencing. Um, when we were first sent home, Steve and I had an unfinished episode of this podcast in production. So we first had to figure out how to get through the process of editing it and we're happy to say that we did, with the help of John Gold, our engineer. And then we had to figure out what came next.

Stephen Winick (01:26):

That's right. Luckily we had some staff members pitching us some interesting blog and Facebook ideas. And I'm a news junkie and I was pretty impressed by how quickly a lot of TV news shows pivoted from having guests in the studio to having guests join the show from their homes on laptops or mobile devices. And I realized these blog and Facebook ideas could actually be made into a podcast episode as well, as long as we were able to record people remotely somehow.

John Fenn (01:51):

So I did some research and I found a platform that allows us to record our remote conversations. And here we are. So Steve mentioned blog and Facebook ideas and those are of course for our companion blog Folklife Today and our Facebook page...

Stephen Winick (02:04):

...which you can find at blogs.loc.gov/folklife and facebook.com/americanfolklifecenter (all one word).

John Fenn (02:13):

And these ideas came from our first two guests, AFC staff members, Michelle Stefano and Allina Migoni. Michelle is a folklorist in the research and programs section and Allina is a reference librarian in the archive section. Welcome to the podcast.

Michelle Stefano (02:26):

Hey.

Allina Migoni

Hello.

Stephen Winick (02:28):

So each of you had an idea that we're drawing on in this podcast and I think chronologically Michelle's came first. So tell me about the idea you had for a couch series on Facebook.

Michelle Stefano (02:38):

Yeah, so it was, I think, uh, my God, time is blurry, but it was like that middle of March week when we were all, um, you know, asked to stay home and work from home, which I'm very grateful for. And you know, obviously the Library's closed, AFC's closed, but I just felt we needed to convey, uh, for those who may not know, that the AFC in many ways is still open, in particular with respect to all the rich online resources that we have, including full collections that have been digitized and placed online. So that from a couch anywhere in the world, you can still do research and, and learn more about, you know, again, our rich collections at the AFC.

Stephen Winick (03:24):

So my immediate answer to that at the time was that that's pretty much what we did on Facebook anyway. That is, an item or collection a day that you can listen to or enjoy while you're staying at home.

John Fenn (03:35):

So that's a, that's a cue all you listeners: visit and please like our Facebook page to get this kind of information that Michelle and Steve are talking about.

Stephen Winick (03:43):

Right! But, but more than that, Michelle's idea did make me realize that we could be better about telling people that we were still working and telling them where all our online collections live. So I wrote a blog post about that called "The American Folklife

Center is On the Job,” and that actually gives you a kind of map to our collections online. So look for that on the blog as well.

John Fenn (04:03):

And Michelle's idea also got us both thinking about the fact that all our staff members have favorite collections. And that idea was really brought home to us even more when Allina pitched her notion. So Allina, tell us about the blog series.

Allina Migoni (04:16):

Yeah. So the idea came really organically after speaking with Michelle and seeing the blog posts that not only are we trying to connect people with our collections, but we should be connecting people with each other and with our staff. And it's really isolating working from home because I usually see my coworkers every day, and I'm lucky to talk to them maybe once a week via assume, um, and WebEx conference calls. So this was just a way to make sure that we were in solidarity with one another and using the collections for what they were meant for: to bring people together, to lift spirits, and to bring us joy. So, um, the pitch was: “why don't we ask our staff what they've been listening to and what they've been working on just to connect us again with our patrons, with researchers, and with the public?”

Stephen Winick (05:05):

Excellent. So Allina, I guess you're going to be the first to tell us what you found and were inspired by in our collections.

Allina Migoni (05:12):

Yeah. So I'm originally from Southern California and I'm Chicana, Mexican-American. So I've had a longing for my Homeland and culture since I've relocated to DC. And what's always brought me some sort of comfort is the fact that I can peruse our collections for Spanish language materials and materials from California that remind me of home. And that's actually part of my job, uh, being a Latinx specialist, trying to poke around the collections to see exactly what is there and how can I bring them to the forefront and connect our researchers with them. So at the very beginning of self-quarantine, which feels like a lifetime ago, I called my mom with one of these finds. So I remembered how I had previously been rooting around the Sidney Robertson Cowell collection for California. And I had actually listened to a sampling of the recordings. That just really brought me a lot of joy and I got a huge kick out of it.

So these were recordings that are available on our online presentation California gold: Northern California folk music from the thirties. In the online presentation, there's a particular set of three pasodobles, which means double steps, that were recorded in Carmel, California. And they've lifted my spirits before. So I was listening to this and they were recorded at the wedding of Ben and Rosa Figueroa on February 18th, 1939. And I can't help but imagine what that wedding must've looked like at that time. Um, I imagine myself there. Of course it's a dream wedding in my idea that it's under the stars. It's super temperate, there's white papel picado. Um, so basically my Pinterest dream board of my own wedding and I, I just, it brings me a lot of joy to think about these

people celebrating so long ago, um, singing songs in Spanish and things that I actually kind of, um, know about.

John Fenn (07:09):

So in, in your blog, Allina, you talk about this phone call you have with your family where you share some of these recordings, right? So tell us about that.

Allina Migoni (07:17):

The first recording that I spoke with my family about and I sent to them was "Atotonilco." I was unfamiliar with the song, but it just sounded interesting. So I sent it to my family and to my surprise, my aunt knew all the words and she started to sing along. It's just was really funny just to go back and forth and I'm genuinely shocked and floored that my family knows these songs.

Stephen Winick (07:43):

Wow. That sounds like a pretty Epic phone call. Um, you also mentioned one of my favorite collection items, which is "Cielito Lindo" by Lottie Espinoza. Um, and she came from the community that Sidney Robertson liked to call Spanish Californians. That is people whose ancestors were in California when it was a Spanish colony. And she had a really colorful life. And according to Sidney Robertson, she'd been married at the age of 13 to a man who was already elderly from whom she learned a lot of songs. And she also had, uh, 11 children and Sidney mentioned that she thought it would be unkind to ask too many questions about that given the age of her husband. So how did you come across Lottie Espinosa and her recording of "Cielito Lindo" and what did it mean to you?

Allina Migoni (08:30):

So I was kind of taken aback that my family knew words to songs. So I wanted to find music that resonated with me, that I know. And "Cielito Lindo" is a ubiquitous tune that is deeply tied to Mexican and Mexican American identities—nationalism. So it was really the first thing that popped into my mind. And when I searched it I was super surprised to find Lottie Espinosa's rendition. So I...like, listening to it immediately brought a smile to my face. She is an interesting singer to say the least. And it's also one of the first songs that I learned in Spanish. And it reminds me to this day of growing up and being four years old and making up words to the songs since I didn't actually know higher lyrics. So yeah, I have a couple of renditions of my own in Spanglish. And so the song itself is actually sung at weddings, funerals, birthdays, and even famously at the world cup and its message and its chorus is "canta y no llores" or "sing and don't cry." And it's super fitting during this epidemic and pandemic. Its verses are dedicated to someone dear to the singer, a beautiful woman who he tells please sing and don't cry because singing brings joy to the hearts of all. It was also famously sung in the streets after the 2018 earthquake in Mexico City by volunteers. And some may call it a pseudo national Anthem, just because everyone truly knows it and they don't know how they learned it. They don't know when they learned it, but they just know it by heart.

John Fenn (10:10):

That's great. And thanks for bringing that song to us, Allina. So let's listen to Lottie's version of "Cielito Lindo."

Lottie Espinosa (10:25):

[Sings a verse and chorus of "Cielito Lindo" in Spanish]

Stephen Winick (11:15):

All right, that was very cool. Again, Lottie Espinosa with "Cielito Lindo." And whenever we talk a lot about this collection, I like to point out that our retired colleague, Cathy Kerst, has written a book about it. And I was lucky enough to help edit that book and it's in press right now. And in her book, Cathy points out that Lottie Espinosa added a couple of unusual verses to that song, including the one about nuns and friars who sleep in the same bed together, but only because they're afraid of ghosts.

Allina Migoni (11:41):

[Laughs]

John Fenn (11:42):

Wow. Sounds like a likely story. Allina, that's not the only version of that song you found in our collections though, is it?

Allina Migoni (11:48):

No, actually I kept on searching and was really excited to find an instrumental version played by a Puerto Rican group called Los Amantes at EL Romance Club. Um, and it was recorded July 3rd of 1977 in Chicago, Illinois. Los Amantes plays a polka medley and rancheras and merengue and they actually play an instrumental version of the song in the style of merengue and it's just really soulful and funky and makes you want to get up and dance. So it, it really brought joy to me and I think everyone should listen to it because there's a really beautiful sentiment in the middle. The performers say in Spanish. This is dedicated to all of my brethren, all of my Mexican and Mexican American brethren, um, with lots of love from your Puerto Rican friends. [Con mucho carino] it's really nice and that's a really sweet sentiment to hear and to know that we're all in this together.

John Fenn (12:50):

That's wonderful. Allina, let's listen to a clip of that song as well.

Los Amantes (14:36):

[Clip of instrumental music with brief speech in Spanish]

John Fenn (14:49):

So having Allina introduce a piece from the Chicago ethnic arts project collection is great because it also allows us to bring in Michelle, whose work during our state home period has been largely with that collection. So Michelle, what have you been up to?

Michelle Stefano (15:01):

Yeah, so, uh, I've been digging into that collection for over two years now cause we've been doing a lot of work at the AFC with collaborations, exploring collaborations in Chicago that's inspired by this collection in particular. I've been working on a new story map and this one is going to be focused on the blues and jazz venues and musicians that are represented in the collection.

Stephen Winick (15:29):

So I guess that means you've been listening to a lot of blues.

Michelle Stefano (15:32):

Yes. Yeah, absolutely. So this story map in particular will be, um, kind of structured into sections or chapters based on many of the jazz and blues clubs. And so yes, of course there's so many recordings of sessions that the folklorists who were responsible for documenting mainly African American traditions within this Chicago ethnic arts collection project. Yeah. So I mean they were, they went, they hung out in nightclubs and, and listened to blues many nights and days during the week. And so yeah, I mean, long story short, that's what I've been listening to. A lot of excellent, soulful, passionate and even funny at times music.

Stephen Winick (16:15):

Excellent.

John Fenn (16:16):

Sounds pretty fun. Is there someone who really stands out that we can share with listeners on the podcast?

Michelle Stefano (16:22):

I first got to say, I've been listening to so many different groups and musicians and harmonica players. For instance, Junior Wells, he was the featured musician and singer and harmonica player at one club on the South side in Chicago called Teresa's Lounge. But then there was also...I've been listening to Lefty Dizz, the Lefty Dizz Shock Treatment, Magic Slim and the Teardrops. But I guess it would be nice maybe to listen to Mary Lane who we're so lucky was recorded in this collection because she's still doing it. She is still a singer and musician and I, in fact, just last year she came out with a new album, *Traveling Woman*, and because of that was interviewed with NPR, who calls her a musician and singer that's been flying under the national radar and she needs a little more appreciation. So again, I think it's wonderful that we have recordings of her and she grew up in Arkansas and as part of the great migration, moved to Chicago around 19, uh, late 1950s and she performed alongside Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James, Magic Sam and Junior Wells, uh, at Teresa's lounge. Perhaps this one song, "If You Don't Put Something In."

Stephen Winick (17:40):

Fantastic. Let's hear that.

Mary Lane (18:18):

[Performs a verse of "If You Don't Put Something In."]

John Fenn (19:01):

And that was Mary Lane with "If You Don't Put Something In." And Michelle, I know there are a lot of interesting field notes in this collection as well. So what do you got?

Michelle Stefano (19:10):

Yeah. So like all the notes and audio logs and final reports of, of the many folklorists that worked in the collection or the project in 1977. Uh, all that information brings such rich context to all the collection items. But with respect to the African American communities and, and the documentation of all sorts of cultural traditions and of course blues and jazz music, the two folklorists responsible for that were Beverly Robinson and Ralph Metcalfe, Jr. So I've taken a lot of nice quiet time to read through all their notes and logs and even of course the final reports from the project. One great example is, um, Ralph Metcalfe Jr in his final report says that "in 1977, Chicago, today's blues thrives in a network of local taverns, lounges, and clubs on any given weekend, at least 40 taverns feature blues bands throughout the city. At least half that number provide entertainment seven nights a week. And therefore there are at least 40 active community bands, uh, blues bands in particular in Chicago today. Some artists tour often, some occasionally, some never. Some of the more successful artists do not work in Chicago at all since they can make much more money out on the road and it costs six to \$10 to see Buddy Guy and Junior Wells in concert when they're out in the road. But for local clubs it's about a dollar."

Michelle Stefano (20:35):

Going into Beverly Robinson's field notes, she really gets into some of the differences within the community perceptions of and uses, if you will, of these clubs and so many of them on the South side of Chicago, but not only, I mean they were also in the Northern parts of the city and some are still going today. But as she notes "the many that were on the South side are where you can witness the struggle," and now I'm quoting her, "of musicians working for a dime a day, but keeping the spirit of a sound intact. These places are not necessarily Teresa's lounge where practically anyone can sit in and claim they are playing the blues. They're more like Florence's and Josephine's lounges where black community members demand top performances. These are places where the musicians and audience interact as one. And no one plays for or to but with." And she knows that that's an important distinction in African American culture. And I thought that was a very powerful quote and I can feel her emphasis in, you know, from based on her research or going around to a lot of these clubs.

Stephen Winick (21:39):

So Michelle, one more thing interested me in that collection that you mentioned and that that's a tradition of "Blue Mondays." Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

Michelle Stefano (21:48):

Yeah, absolutely. Within the circuit, and again, music's playing, you know, every night with these many taverns, bars and lounges, there were these days dedicated to the blues and in particular one was called Blue Monday. And I think it's best to start out with a definition that Lefty Dizz himself uses. Ralph Metcalf Jr., the folklorist, interviewed Dizz outside of the checkerboard lounge. And actually I think that that interview took place in a car cause there's some photos of them talking in a car. In any case, Lefty Dizz explains that blue Monday is pretty self-explanatory. "It's after a hard weekend," and I'm quoting him now. "Everybody's partied down and you know, you're trying to recoup for the rest of the week. And so on Monday you go down and hear a little blues, lift your spirits and have a good time." So a lot of the recordings are from different clubs during blue Mondays and this is during the day as well. They're not just evening or nighttime performances. And...

Stephen Winick (22:49):

I think that's funny. It's like how you have to unwind after your hard weekend. That's great.

Michelle Stefano (22:58):

Yeah, I thought that was funny too. And listening to these recordings from my couch, you know? Yeah. They kind of rejuvenate me, you know, in this, you know, these tough times. So it does work. But um, Ralph Metcalf Jr. was noting that at the time of the project in Chicago, mainly it was the checkerboard and Teresa's lounge that were still keeping this blue Monday tradition going and even visiting artists and musicians would, you know, tap into this blue Monday and also blue Sunday circuit. And so blue Sunday, based on our collection was also happening at Florence's lounge. And they had a blue Sunday that would go from 2:00 PM down to 7:00 PM and I'm sure it stayed open after seven and we have lots of recordings of magic slim and the teardrops playing there, but also this married duo queen Sylvia Embry and her husband John Embry who plays guitar and Sylvia would sing and so we have a great recording of them. Uh, "I Found a Love" on a late Sunday in May, 1977 at Florence's lounge.

John Fenn (24:01):

Fantastic. We'll hear a little of the Embrys but first to our two guests, Michelle and Elena, thank you for joining us on the podcast. Thanks so much.

Michelle Stefano (24:09):

You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

Allina Migoni (24:11):

Thank you for having me too.

John Fenn (24:12):

All right, take care.

Stephen Winick (24:13):

Bye.

John & Sylvia Embry (24:25):

John & Sylvia Embry perform "I Found a Love."

John Fenn (25:13):

So once again, that was queen Sylvia Embry and John Embry with "I Found a Love." And we're going to have some more guests in a minute, but we've also been exploring collections and working on them ourselves while we're at home. So what have you been up to, Steve?

Stephen Winick (25:26):

Well, a number of things. As you know, we're always thinking of new blogs and podcasts and with the new normal that's setting in, we really think people will be spending more time at home, not just in the short term but in the medium term as well. I mean, I don't see myself going to a big sporting event or stadium concert for the rest of 2020 although smaller gatherings may come back sooner. I really think an adjustment toward a greater amount of home time is likely for our culture for awhile. So we're thinking of ways to do more from home and ways to engage people who are at home and I think that's taking up a good deal of your time as well as mine.

John Fenn (26:00):

Absolutely. We have several initiatives we're working on. It's probably a little premature to talk about them on the podcast, but in the time between recording it and releasing it, we'll be making some announcements and as always, the best place to find those is on our blog at blogs.loc.gov/folklife. So Steve, that was a little vague. What specific projects can you tell us about?

Stephen Winick (26:22):

For the first part of our stay at home working time, I was working on a couple of articles for No Depression magazine. One was for the print magazine and it was about the *By the People* project, which our last podcast episode was also about, but the other was for the online version and it's a new idea we've had where No Depression is going to be featuring items from the AFC archive and a feature called roots in archive. And the first of those articles is about a set of 19 recordings. We have online of Zora Neale Hurston singing songs and describing folklore in the 1930s.

John Fenn (26:54):

So for those who might not know the name, Zora Neale Hurston is best known as a novelist, especially for *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She was part of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s but she was also a trained anthropologist and folklorist studying at Columbia University with Franz Boas. She did a lot of folklore collecting from the mid 1930s on. So what was the context for these recordings you're listening to, Steve?

Stephen Winick (27:17):

In the late 1930s she joined the Florida writers project as a folklore collector, and in 1939 they got word that the Work Projects Administration's joint committee on the folk arts, which was a national committee, was sending folklorist Herbert Halpert on a Southern recording trip. Hurston wrote a proposal for him to come to Florida and have her act as his guide to the African American community. The proposal was accepted but modified because it was the segregated South. It would have been a scandal to have a white man and a black woman traveling together. So they had her go on ahead and scout talent and Halpert came along a few days later with Stetson Kennedy to do the actual recordings.

John Fenn (27:55):

That doesn't sound like the most effective plan for fieldwork.

Stephen Winick (27:59):

Right. It turns out a lot of African Americans were happy to hang out with Zora and perform for her, and then would be hard to find when the weird white men from the government showed up later. But it did mean that Halpert had some discs left over and felt it was worthwhile to record Zora's favorite songs directly from her. So she sings a variety of songs including railroad work songs, social songs, and a song that was sung as part of a card game called Georgia skin.

John Fenn (28:25):

Alright. So what's your favorite?

Stephen Winick (28:27):

Well, my favorite is a song called "Uncle Bud." It's a weird and mildly dirty song, but she self censors, so there aren't any real swear words in the version that we have recorded. But the thing I really like about it is the introduction, and forgive me for explaining it before we hear it, but I play it for students and other audiences all the time. And most people don't hear it well enough to get what's happening. So to set the scene, Halpert is recording her, but there are at least two other people present: Stetson Kennedy, who was Zora's direct supervisor in the Writers Project and Carita Doggett Corse, the head of the Florida Writers Project. We know they're all there because they all speak on some of the discs.

John Fenn (29:04):

So in business terms, she's with her boss and her boss's boss and the visiting executive from corporate that they're all trying to impress.

Stephen Winick (29:13):

Exactly. And after she explains the song Halpert asks if "Uncle Bud" would be sung before the respectable ladies. And she is emphatic that men wouldn't sing the song in front of respectable ladies or in front of any woman. But a jook woman, which means a

woman associated with barrooms, gambling houses and brothels, women of low reputation. And then there's kind of a pause because you see Zora's problem.

John Fenn (29:36):

Yeah. If it would be only sung in front of women of low reputation, how did Zora hear it? Unless she was one of those woman.

Stephen Winick (29:45):

Exactly. And the pause goes on for a while and then someone speaks up and I actually think it's Stetson, though it could be Dr. Halpert. I knew both of them many years later, but the voice is indistinct. But the person says, "but you heard it from women, right?" And then Zora laughs with relief and agrees. Yes, I heard it from women.

John Fenn (30:05):

So let's hear Zora Neale Hurston with "Uncle Bud."

Herbert Halpert (30:09):

Would it be sung before the, the uh, the respectable ladies.

Speaker 2 (30:13):

Never. It's one of those jook songs and the woman that they sing "Uncle Bud" in front of is a jook woman.

Stetson Kennedy or Herbert Halpert (30:21):

But of course YOU heard it from woman.

Speaker 2 (30:23):

Yes, I heard it from women! [Laughs]

Uncle Bud's a man, a man like this;
He can't get a woman, gonna use his fist.
Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud.
Go into town, gonna hurry back.
Uncle Bud's got somethin' I sure do lack.
Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud.

Stephen Winick (30:50):

So that was "Uncle Bud." and I put a little teaser blog up about this at blogs.loc.gov/folklife. So look for a recent post about Zora and from there you can link to No Depression online, which is where the full article is posted.

John Fenn (31:04):

Great. Thanks Steve. And now we've got another guest with us, Maya Lerman

Stephen Winick (31:08):

And Maya is one of our archivists at the American Folklife Center. So hi Maya.

Maya Lerman (31:12):

Hi John. Hi Steve.

John Fenn (31:14):

Hey Maya. Good to have you. Could you start off by describing some of your typical job activities at the American Folklife Center?

Maya Lerman (31:20):

So as an archivist, my main goal is to help with providing access points to researchers to help discover our collections. We organize collections in a way that makes sense from the collector's perspective and for access so people understand what the collection is about. And we also describe the items and the materials in the collection in order to create finding aids and to enrich our collection catalog records. So working from home has shifted that work because I'm not able to see or access many of the collection materials that I, that I normally access, but I'm still finding ways to do this work of improving access for researchers, and one's through delving into specific recordings from an online collection that we have to improve access to subjects and keywords for researchers to access those materials that are, that are online already.

Stephen Winick (32:21):

Amazing. So what have you been working on lately?

Maya Lerman (32:23):

Prior to the pandemic, um, I had been working on the John Cohen collection and I'd finished processing it and I was preparing for the finding aid to go online. So if you weren't familiar with, for those who aren't familiar with John Cohen, he's a folk musician and artist, writer, folklorist and really an amazing guy. And the John Cohen collection is rich with his artwork, photographs, manuscripts, recordings, and film projects. So over the last few weeks I've been able to research and write about more aspects of John Cohen's life. So this kind of work can enrich the finding aid. For instance, I've been working on, um, a deeper biographical note, which we'll go into the finding aid and catalog record. He passed away in September, this past September, 2019. So I've been reading different obituaries, articles, and I've also been delving into some of his specific passions, the Q'eros people of the Peruvian Andes and the abstract expressionist movement in New York in the late fifties and sixties. And also, um, he recorded many albums with his band, the New Lost City Ramblers. Most of those were on Folkways records now Smithsonian Folkways. So I've been reading his liner notes because he's got extensive liner notes on those albums. And he's also produced albums on, on Smithsonian Folkways. So, so those resources have given me a broader understanding of his life.

John Fenn (34:03):

And as you know, um, our blog Folklife Today has a lot of mentions of John Cohen, a lot of resources about him including a concert and an oral history interview and we'll probably have a post when this finding aid goes up. So where, where are we with the finding aid?

Maya Lerman (34:17):

So we're pretty close I would say within the next couple of months. It's a bit dependent on staff availability because everything is shifted right now because of the pandemic. It's been a process to know who's able to do what. But I'm hopeful that it will be going online within the next month or two.

Stephen Winick (34:38):

Yeah, we're really looking forward to the extra access that will give us and of course we definitely understand the strictures that our colleagues in other divisions and our colleagues in AFC are working with given the pandemic. It's, it's a little weird, but that's also what this podcast episode is about. So I understand you're also working on another collection and you even brought us some audio from that.

Maya Lerman (35:01):

I did. So I was going to play a fiddle tune called "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss." And I chose this because you can hear both the fiddle tune, you're right in the middle of the performers and you can also hear in the background, if you listen closely, you can hear someone calling square dance calls.

John Fenn (35:21):

Great. Let's listen to it.

Whit Sizemore Band: (35:37):

Plays "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss."

John Fenn (36:13):

So again, we're here with Maya Lerman, an archivist at the American Folklife Center and she just introduced us to that sweet fiddle tune. Um, what collection was that from Maya?

Maya Lerman (36:24):

That's from the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project, which was a survey that was conducted by the American Folklife Center in collaboration with the national park service. Um, it was done in 1978 and it documented a range of folklife, including music, old time music, religious music, um, foodways, dance, tales, farming. And so the whole collection went online, um, this past September in 2019. And the photographs and field notes and manuscripts and recordings are accessible from anywhere with an internet connection. So what that work involves is getting a deeper understanding of a collection that I've already been working on and processing and then learning more about the collection and writing about it. And it's really been an amazing opportunity to just listen

to full recordings from a collection. A lot of times in our work we just don't get that chance to, to listen to full recordings because we just have so much material that we're trying to process and arrange and describe and make accessible.

Maya Lerman (37:31):

So it's been a great opportunity for me to like learn more about this Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project. Something that I'm also interested in because I, I play bluegrass and old time music. So this region of the U.S. is, has been, uh, an area of interest for me for a long time. So what I've been doing is listening to the recordings and writing summaries of what, what they're about. And there's also logs that the field researcher compiled. So I'm looking at the logs and I'm listening to the recordings and writing summaries of each recording that will go online.

Stephen Winick (38:07):

So it will make it possible for people to find recordings in the collection by searching on tune titles or subjects that you mentioned in the summaries. Is that how it works?

Maya Lerman (38:15):

Exactly, yeah. When, when possible I'm gonna add song titles and, and kind of key words as you, as you say, um, so that people can search for the things they're interested in or songs they're interested in.

John Fenn (38:29):

Well that's, it's such important work, Maya, and as you said, you have the time to do this now in ways that you can't when we're onsite processing in such different ways. So thanks for that.

Maya Lerman (38:39):

You're welcome.

John Fenn (38:39):

But before you go, you had another clip from that collection you wanted to share with us, right?

Maya Lerman (38:44):

I did. Yeah. So this is part of an interview with the Fiddler Tommy Jarrell who is big deal in the old time music community because of his great fiddling and banjo playing and singing. And a lot of people who are getting into old time music, like in the seventies and eighties, were going to, they heard about Tommy Jarrell because he was known for his, his Round Peak style and his proficiency on the instruments that he played. Um, and they would go learn from him. So he was really generous with his knowledge and the tunes that he knew. And he received an NEA national heritage fellowship in 1982. So I'm not sure if people really know that we have Tommy Jarrell material and this blue Ridge Parkway Folklife collection. So in this recording he's describing the music and dances that he grew up with. And I thought it was interesting because he talks about sort of the

early origins of old time music and the early 1900s, which was when he was growing up. And he also talks about cotillion dances. Um, which is interesting because it was sort of a French social dance, um, which was a forerunner of the square dance.

Stephen Winick (39:53):

Great. Let's hear Tommy Jarrell.

Margaret Counts Owen (39:56):

You've talked about dances where they...can you tell me about them? What were they like...how many people there were, what kind of music?

Tommy Jarrell (40:04):

Well, we had to start with, it wasn't nothing but just the banjo and the fiddle, I guess I was 12--12 years old before ever I saw a guitar.

Margaret Counts Owen (40:19):

And you were born

Tommy Jarrell (40:21):

Born 1901 March 1st. And uh, there's a lady brought a guitar down and her and--her and my daddy played some together. Some kind of sacred songs.

Margaret Counts Owen (40:36):

That was, now, that was in the Round Peak section.

Tommy Jarrell (40:38):

Yeah. Yeah. That was up at our old home place. That was about 19 and, well I'll say 12 and a half.

Tommy Jarrell (40:51):

Yeah, somewhere right along about that time.

Margaret Counts Owen (40:55):

So for the first dances you remember they just had banjo and fiddle.

Tommy Jarrell (40:58):

Yeah. First things that I recollect, seeing them dance was they called them cotillions.

Margaret Counts Owen (41:03):

Cotillions?

Tommy Jarrell (41:06):

I don't know how they, I don't know how to spell that and I can't spell it for you, but it's cotillions. It's kinda like that tune of daddy's that he called Richmond Cotillion.

Margaret Counts Owen (41:14):

Uh huh.

Tommy Jarrell (41:16):

And you know, he calls, he calls reel on that while he's a-playin' that. Have you ever heard that?

Margaret Counts Owen (41:21):

I'm not sure I have. Maybe I'll have to listen to that in a few minutes.

Tommy Jarrell (41:24):

Well he calls reel and plays the fiddle at the same time on the, on the record.

Margaret Counts Owen (41:31):

Is that, uh, when they danced the cotillion, was that in a circle or lined up?

Tommy Jarrell (41:37):

Well, you know, they chose their partners, you know, and they, they all lined up and they circled around halfway around the house and then back then they swung their partner. And then the first reel, I recollect of a person I ever learned to run. I don't, I don't know what to call it, but anyhow, the first lady is one to the right, the man to her right. And then she swung her partner and on to the next couple till she went all the way around.

Stephen Winick (42:05):

So John, now it's time to find out what you've been listening to.

John Fenn (42:09):

Well, the past week or so I've been spending time with what we colloquially referred to at AFC as the Rael collection, but the full name of the online presentation is Hispano Music and Culture of the Northern Rio Grande, the Juan B. Rael collection.

Stephen Winick (42:21):

So what piqued your interest about that collection?

John Fenn (42:24):

Well, last year at about this time I was invited out to the San Luis Valley in Southern Colorado to help out as a guest instructor for a program called the art and rural environments field school. It's hosted by the University of Colorado Boulder and for the past few years has focused on communities in the very area of Colorado where Rael made many of those recordings in the collection that we have. In fact, we stayed in these

beautiful old Adobe houses on the land that the Rael family has lived on for seven generations. Ron Rael, prominent architect, artist and scholar of all things Adobe as well as the descendant of Juan B. Rael, was one of our hosts, and it was great to hear him talk about the land and the diversity of people who have called this area home over the past several thousand years. It's a complicated history, so we can't really get into it here. Um, and the collection we have at the AFC offers just a small piece of that history via audio recordings.

Stephen Winick (43:17):

Great. Um, what particular treasures did you find in that collection?

John Fenn (43:21):

Well, Juan B. Rael was a folklorist originally from that area and a faculty member at Stanford. In the late 1930s he started a research project looking for all the music to popular ballads, weddings and miscellaneous songs, at least 20 of which occur in the various folk plays of the region as he wrote to Harold Spivacke at the Library of Congress in November, 1939. As some listeners may know, Spivacke was in charge of the archive of folk song at the time, the predecessor to the archives at the American Folklife Center. Now Rael was writing to see if he could get ahold of an instantaneous disc cutter and some blank disks to support his field work out in Colorado and New Mexico. Ultimately using a combination of equipment on loan from the Library of Congress and another institution, Rael recorded 136 tracks across 36 disks. This amounts to about eight hours of field recordings of traditional music from Spanish speaking communities in the area in the early 1940s. The full collection is available online at loc.gov/collections.

Stephen Winick (44:22):

Yeah, it's a great collection and I think a lot of us staff members dip into it and listen to some of the great material that's on there. So you brought a particular song for us to hear?

John Fenn (44:31):

Yeah, I managed to choose one out of the bunch. Um, it's an instrumental tune called "Valse del Coyote" or coyotes waltz in English. I made a handful of recordings with Adelaido and Adolfo Chavez, the brothers who we're about to hear. The recording was made in Antonito, Colorado, where Adelaido lived and where I stayed last year. Adelaido was 68 at the time and plays violin while Adolfo who was on guitar was 65. He lived about seven miles up the road in Romeo, Colorado. Here's the tune.

Adelaido and Adolfo Chavez (45:51):

[Playing "Valse del Coyote."]

Stephen Winick (45:51):

So again that was "Valse del Coyote" from Adelaido and Adolfo Chavez chosen for us by John Fenn. Thanks.

John Fenn (45:58):

Sure.

Stephen Winick (46:00):

And John has actually picked just one more piece from the Rael collection to play us out. But first we should thank all our guests, Michelle Stefano, Allina Migoni and Maya Lerman. We know it was a little weird and experimental to join us from your homes, so thanks everyone for being good sports and adapting to our strange circumstances.

John Fenn (46:19):

And we also want to thank our engineer Jon Gold. He didn't do his usual setup or recording in the studio because we can't even go to the studio, but he may very well be involved in postproduction work on the show. And we want to thank our colleagues throughout the Library of Congress who will have to figure out how to deploy this podcast while they are all staying at home.

Stephen Winick (46:38):

Yes, we miss you Jon Gold and also Mike Turpin and Jay Kinloch and we send extra thanks to everyone at the Library of Congress. The Library has really done a great job of making it possible for us to do our jobs from home and we really do appreciate having jobs and having colleagues who do their jobs so well under such difficult circumstances.

John Fenn (46:59):

I fully agree, Steve, and we want our regular listeners to know that we're working on future episodes along the same lines as this one, including one where we talk with Thea Austen about the Homegrown Concert Series and all the webcasts. So now to take us out some more music from the Juan B. Rael Collection. This is the Chavez brothers again with Amado Trujillo, playing "Los Bienaventurados," which means the blessed ones. The lyrics began, bless it, be the readers, advertisers, and subscribers, which suggest that this was originally newspaper that highlights the fact that a large part of the Hispanic population documented by Rael was literate in Spanish, largely through homeschooling.

Stephen Winick (47:37):

Excellent. Let's hear it "Los Bienaventurados," the blessed ones, and may you all be blessed as well. Until next time.

Adelaido and Adolfo Chavez with Amado Trujillo (47:59):

[Playing "Los Bienaventurados."]

Announcer (48:31):

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