Stephen Winick: Welcome to Folklife Today. I'm Stephen Winick, a folklife specialist in Research and Programs at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and the instigator of the Folklife Today blog and podcast. I'm being joined by my colleague Michelle Stefano, also a folklife specialist at the center.

Michelle Stefano: That's right. We are about halfway through our Homegrown Concert Series. So we thought we'd take a look back and a look ahead at this year's 2023 Homegrown concert series, which we're producing right now—as we record this podcast, production is occurring in the background!

Stephen Winick: And speaking of production, we're being joined right now by Thea Austen!

Michelle Stefano: Hello, Thea!

Thea Austen: Hello!

Michelle Stefano: Thea Austen is of course the Public Events Coordinator for the Center, and thus the producer of the Homegrown concert series. So what’s new and exciting in Homegrown this year, Thea?

Thea Austen: Well, I’d say a lot of things, but one biggie that underlies the whole series. As you know, the pandemic shutdown occurred before real production was underway on our 2020 concert series, and we did our 2020 and 2021 series entirely online: we had individuals or groups make concert videos and send them to us. Then last year we were able to add just a couple of live, in-person concerts to the series, like Ranky Tanky and Alilo. But this year, we’re doing a fully hybrid series, with some concerts live at the Library of Congress, and some video premieres of pre-recorded concerts.

Stephen Winick: Yes, I think one thing we learned from the Homegrown at Home series was that by premiering concert videos instead of producing
every concert live, we were able to present some groups and some traditions that would have been hard to present here in Washington.

Thea Austen: Exactly. And we wanted to continue presenting really international music, while also returning to the great live concerts we’ve been known for all these years. So this year features some of each!

Michelle Stefano: All right, where did we start?

Thea Austen: we kicked off 2023 during Black History month, with Jake Blount. Jake is a groundbreaking young singer, fiddler, banjo-player, and guitarist. He’s a DC native, though he lives in New England now. And really, it was Steve’s idea to have Jake Blount, so maybe you can tell us more, Steve.

Stephen Winick: Sure! So as Thea mentioned, Jake is a native of Washington, DC. I became aware of Jake not just because of his general reputation, but because on his latest recording, The New Faith, on which about half the tracks are new interpretations of material from the American Folklife Center archive. So the idea of working with him was in the American Folklife Center part of my brain. But then I also happened to be the programming chair of the Folklore Society of Greater Washington. And one of the great people in our organization, FSGW, is Cecily Pilzer, who happens to be a school librarian by training...and she was Jake’s elementary school librarian, so she’s known him since he was a kid. And when I became program chair, she said “you just have to have Jake, he’s so brilliant.” But frankly, FSGW would have had trouble affording Jake’s fee and also renting out a venue to make the concert happen, so I realized the beauty of co-sponsorship! We had the concert here at the Library of Congress in the Homegrown series, but with FSGW as a co-sponsor.

Michelle Stefano: So why don’t we hear something from the concert?

Thea Austen: Great idea! This is Jake’s reimagining of a sea shanty from the repertoire of Lead Belly, “Haul Away Joe.”

[Jake Blount sings “Haul Away Joe”]

Steve Winick: Once again, that was “Haul Away Joe” by Jake Blount, and in our interview, I talked a bit with Jake about his discovery of the Library of Congress. Let’s hear a brief clip.
Michelle Stefano: Fantastic. It’s really nice when people draw on our archive and share the cultural richness that we help to preserve here at the American Folklife Center. So the Jake Blount concert and interview are online at the Folklife Today blog, as well as the Library of Congress website and YouTube channel. By all means subscribe to the Folklife Today blog at blogs.loc.gov/folklife, and you’ll get notified of concerts when they premiere or when the videos of our in-person concerts go online. So I think we had another example of a group learning songs from our archive to perform, didn’t we?

Thea Austen: Yes, another of the live concerts we’ve had this season was the Scandinavian group Spaelimenninir. They are based in the tiny nation of the Faroe Islands, but their group also includes Danish people and Americans, and they play music from all the Scandinavian countries. The band likes to say that its sound reflects each member’s heritage and also illustrates the links between the music traditions of the Scandinavian countries and the United States. And this time they really put their money where their mouth is, because with a little help from Steve here, they took the archive challenge and learned some tunes out of the American Folklife Center archive.

Stephen Winick: That’s right. One of the two Americans in Spaelimenninir is Charlie Pilzer, a good friend of mine and a Takoma Park neighbor. And when Charlie was over in the Faroes preparing for the band’s tour, I texted him with some links to collections in the American Folklife Center archive where he could find Scandinavian tunes. And he consulted with his bandmates...so let’s hear the rest of the story from Charlie, and then hear the tunes!

Michelle Stefano: Again that was Spaelimenninir, with some children’s dance tunes from a Danish collection in the archive. And we do love when people go deep into the archive to find material. So Thea, this has been a challenging season so far for our in-person concerts, but that’s recently gotten better. Tell us about that.

Thea Austen: Yes, it’s been a tough year. In December 2022, our beloved Coolidge Auditorium suffered a flood, and it was out of commission for
about 6 months. So our live concerts were held in other rooms until the most recent one. And then on that concert, our first one back in the repaired Coolidge Auditorium, we had a performer all lined up, and he became ill and couldn’t make it, so at extremely short notice we invited and contracted with another artist—we had a three-day turnaround. So our first show back in the Coolidge on June 15 was Christylez Bacon, a Grammy Nominated Progressive Hip-Hop artist and multi-instrumentalist from Washington, D.C. As a performer, Christylez is a master of the human beat-box, he plays guitar and percussion, and he continues the oral tradition of storytelling through his lyrics. Early in his career, he was mentored by Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer, and began collaborating with artists in the folk and children’s music genres, and his album with Cathy and Marcy, Banjo to Beatbox, was nominated for a Grammy award. And this made him think more about hip-hop as a folk music genre.

Stephen Winick: Right, and we got a chance to talk about that in our interview, so let’s hear what Christylez has to say about folk and hip-hop.

[Christylez Bacon:

Hip hop is folk music, right? Is it not? Like, we just have different ways of doing it! Like, you know, when we think about folk music, we think about it like locked within a certain period of time. When that's not the way, right?

Certain technologies, they come into existence, you know what I’m saying? Back in the day, it’s the gourd, you know what I’m saying? You use that gourd, that animal skin, you know what I’m saying? And maybe... And maybe even like, now or in the future. It's just like, what’s the technology and what’s the stuff you have? Cell phone chips. You know, say computer chips and cell phones and like an old technology and like, you know, I think it was Grandmaster Flash that used in New York City created his specialized crossfader to link together two of these turntables to really like be able to sync and do this turntablism stuff. Right. Electrical engineering. Taking these things, hooking it up, putting it together like. Okay, yeah, that’s the move right there. That’s the move. Or like people sampling, right? You have like a two second or a three second sample. It was The Large Professor, a MC and a producer who was like, Yo, what are we going to do is we going to take the RPM on the turntable. We’re going to speed that bad boy up, sample it and then pitch it down. So it started as two seconds, but
now we have like, like close to a minute or like or whatever or half a minute now from two seconds just because he sampled it at a faster rate and slowed it down, right?

Like the ingenuity, like how we create stuff. It's kind of like taking like cigar boxes and creating guitars, you know what I'm saying? That's that's how we do it. And then if you're like, okay, we want to take away like electronics, we got the human beatbox. That happens when you don't have the drums and stuff. And we have like the oral history and the storytelling there. We have other things like scat and it's the same stuff. It's all a continuum of folk arts and expression, you know what I'm saying? It just looks different. It just sounds different.

**Michelle Stefano:** Great. So now let’s hear one of his songs. One thing I thought was really impressive was a freestyling song, where he got about 10 random words from the audience and he made them into a rap, proving how adaptive and conversational rhyming can be. It really demonstrates how hip-hop is an emergent folk art. Let’s hear Christylez Bacon freestyling.

[Asset: Christylez concert 53:40-53:55 (saying the words until his mic cuts out) then fade to 54:46 (Starting “I’m kinda nervous”) - 58:19]

**Stephen Winick:** Again, that was Christylez Bacon freestyling during his homegrown concert on June 15th. And we should say that Christylez was accompanied by Uasuf Gueye on percussion, including the bala or balafon, one of the West African ancestors of the xylophone. So there was African music, there was jazz, there was hip-hop, there were some Brazilian influences in there—it was a great mix of African and African American roots styles for Juneteenth. So look for that on our blog at blogs.loc.gov/folklife, once the videos are edited and processed.

**Michelle Stefano:** Now, we’ve already talked about musicians delving into our archive, but we also encourage folks to go out and do their own fieldwork, recording songs and stories and history from oral tradition. We have resources online to help with that, like our field manual Folklife and Fieldwork, and even some grants and fellowships to help you get started, all online at loc.gov/folklife. And I understand that one of the performers who sent us a pre-recorded concert video did that kind of field research to put together his concert.
Stephen Winick: Yes, Michelle, you’re thinking of Ali Dogan Gonultas, who is part of the Kurdish community in Turkey. Thea, tell us a little more about Ali.

Thea Austen: Ali is a Kurdish musician born in Turkey. He’s well known for being part of the popular band Ze Tijê, but at the same time he’s maintained his roots in traditional music. Ali’s oral history and field research, which he began in 2007, led to the 2022 album “Kiği," and to this concert video. It’s a personal look at the 150-year musical history of the village of Kiği, Ali’s birthplace. And it’s also very much affected by his neighborhood in Istanbul, where a lot of people from Kigi have ended up. He sings in five languages and plays several instruments. The concert features his quartet with tembur, a stringed instrument like in tamburitza music, clarinet, percussion, and other wind instruments like the zurna. He plays traditional Kurdish dances, laments, work songs, and Alevi prayers, and it’s just a beautiful concert.

Michelle Stefano: so what did you bring to play for us?

Stephen Winick: this is a lighthearted story-song about a peddler who travels from village to village selling clothes, and in each village he tries to use the pretty clothes to attract the daughter of the village leader so he can make an advantageous marriage. It’s called Enterçime.

[Ali Dogan Gonultas sings Enterçime]


Michelle Stefano: Wow, another great song from one of our concert video premieres. Steve has also interviewed Ali, and both videos are available on the blog: Blogs.loc.gov/folklife. So we are going to thank the producer of the Homegrown Concert series, Thea Austen, who is going off to work on our next concert while we finish up recording this podcast! Thanks Thea!

Stephen Winick: Big thanks to Thea!

Thea Austen: Thanks for having me!

Michelle Stefano: so, Steve, what’s left this season?

Stephen Winick: Well, we had a live concert of Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer with Chao Tian in their great program From China to Appalachia,
and we expect to get that video online soon, and we had another prerecorded video premiere from the Hudaki Village Band from Ukraine on August 2nd. And we’ll say more about them in a minute. Then on August 23, I’m really excited for Deitsch from Germany, a band I’ve been following for years. They’ve recorded a special concert for us at an open-air museum in Germany. And again, those all premiere on the Folklife Today blog at blogs.loc.gov/folklife. And they’ll also be available on the same day on our Library of Congress YouTube channel.

Then in September, we have two live concerts: The first is Nani Noam Vazana on September 14, one of the only songwriters working in the Judeo-Spanish or Ladino language, and a great singer and also trombone player. Thea and I saw Nani at Folk Alliance and she is fantastic. That is a noontime concert at the Library of Congress.

Michelle Stefano: So now we come to the secret. The real reason we booted Thea off early is that we wanted to introduce a new member of our little cast of characters here on the Folklife Today podcast. So let’s all welcome Doug Peach, one of our newest folklife specialists on the production team! Doug, since you’re new to the podcast, before we get to more Homegrown concerts... tell us a little about yourself!

Doug Peach: Thank you so much, Michelle. First, let me begin by saying what an honor it is to be among the cast of characters here at the American Folklife Center. Throughout my career, I’ve been a big fan, shall we say, of the work of the folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and archivists here at the American Folklife Center. And, I also want to share that it is humbling to be a part of the legacy of the American Folklife Center and the important musical archives that pre-date it. All that to say – I’m incredibly happy to be here.

As for me, I’m an ethnomusicologist and public folklorist – I say it that way because, while my training has been in music and ethnomusicology, my professional experience has been in public folklore—which is taking the tools of folklore studies and using them for the good of the public. Before coming to the American Folklife Center, I directed two public folklore programs—the first for the state of South Carolina at McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina and the SC Arts Commission, then the
second at Sandy Spring Museum, which serves as the Regional Folklife Center for Montgomery County, Maryland.

In terms of my academic work, I’ve spent years working with Gullah Geechee communities in South Carolina, doing collaborative research with Gullah people on issues of heritage tourism, representation, and musical performance. I had the great pleasure of traveling with Gullah musicians to Sierra Leone, in West Africa, as a part of that research. I’m finishing up my dissertation on these topics in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University, working with ethnomusicologist Mellonee V. Burnim. While at Indiana, I also co-authored a book and two-CD set titled *Ola Belle Reed and Southern Mountain Music on the Mason-Dixon Line*, on Dust-to-Digital, which details the life of musician Ola Belle Reed, her family’s migration to the tri-state area of MD, PA, and DE, and the musical legacy continued in that region by the generation after Ola Belle. I had the great pleasure of working with folklorist Henry Glassie and now-director of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Clifford Murphy, on that project.

Here, at the American Folklife Center, one of the projects I’m most excited about is the COVID-19 American History Project—an initiative championed by Rep. Julia Letlow of Louisiana to collect, preserve, and make available oral histories of Americans’ experiences with COVID-19. The goal of this project is for Americans, 50, 100, or even 150 years from now, to understand what it was like to live during a pandemic. I’ll also be working on a range of other public programs to amplify the collections and public-facing work of the American Folklife Center.

**Stephen Winick:** I’ll just say that many of us on the staff knew Doug not only from the academic folklore world but also as a very competent concert producer, and in fact the band I sing in, the Ocean quartet, performed in his series at the museum! So we’re delighted to have Doug at the American Folklife Center.

**Doug Peach:** Thank you.

**Michelle Stefano:** So, we thought you’d be the perfect person to tell us about the September 21 concert!

**Doug Peach:** All right, then! On September 21 at 7:00 pm, as part of Live at the Library, we are featuring the Alejandro Brittes quartet based in
southern Brazil, who play music in the traditional, cross-border musical genre of chamamé. Chamame’s epicenter is northeast Argentina and has a mix of influences from Iberian, indigenous guarani, and eastern European populations coming to this area. The music has been inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. I actually lived for a while in Argentina and played a little chamame with friends, so I look forward to do the interview with Alejandro Brittes, which we hope will go online with his concert video.

**Michelle Stefano:** Thanks, Doug. And it is possible we’ll be adding even more great concerts to our lineup, so we do recommend that you subscribe to our blog at blogs.loc.gov/folklife. And if you go to loc.gov/folklife you can also subscribe to our email alerts and our facebook page, so you won’t miss any of our great concerts.

**Stephen Winick:** so now it’s time for thank yous: Thanks to all the musicians we have featured in this podcast, and to our guests Thea Austen and Doug Peach. Only Doug is still here to receive our thanks in real time!

**Michelle Stefano:** Yes, thank you Doug!

**Doug Peach:** You’re very welcome and I’ll make sure the word gets back to Thea.

**Stephen Winick:** and thanks also to Jon Gold, our engineer, and to all the folks in the Library of Congress who help us make and deploy this podcast.

**Michelle Stefano:** and we do have one more musical selection, and Doug is going to tell us about it. Doug is going to be one of our staff specialists on various areas of the world, including Argentina since he lived there, and Ukraine, since he has spent time studying that culture. So—no pressure—but tell us about the next piece, Doug.

**Doug Peach:** Sure thing, Michelle! This is the Hudaki Village Band, which is made up of nine master musicians from the Ukrainian Carpathians, a mountainous area of Southwest Ukraine on the border with Romania and Hungary. There, the village musicians are called hudaki, hence the name of the group. The music has Slavic, Romanian, Jewish, and Romani influences, because these peoples have lived side by side for centuries. In 20 years of performing at hundreds of festivals and concert halls across Europe, the Hudaki Village Band has learned to make their unique blend of
influences accessible to lots of people, so we think you’ll enjoy it. This song is a wedding march called Solonyna.

**Stephen Winick**: Thanks, Doug. And thanks to everyone for listening to the Folklife Today podcast! We will let the Hudaki Village Band play us out.

[Hudaki Village Band play “Solonyna”]