

THE Current

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Major Donation to Enable UCSB Libraries to Produce Discography of Victor Records

William R. Moran, a noted discographer, author, and collector, has donated \$1.7 million to the University Libraries at UC Santa Barbara for the completion of the Victor Project, a multi-volume encyclopedia cataloging all of the recordings made by the Victor Talking Machine Company (which later became RCA Victor) from 1900 to 1950.

The "Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Records" represents the only systematic published account of these historic recording sessions since few trade catalogs exist for the period.

(Discography is the study and cataloging of phonograph records.)

"This invaluable series is a cornerstone in the ongoing scholarly documentation of early recorded sound that will be used by researchers across the disciplines, as well as by music enthusiasts," said Sarah Pritchard, University Librarian.

The Victor Talking Machine Co., with headquarters in Camden, New Jersey, was the most successful recognized international recording company of the first quarter of the 20th century.

Its trademark of a little fox terrier listening to the horn of a Gramophone (called "His Master's Voice") became perhaps the world's best-known symbol of its time.

Eldridge Reeves Johnson, founder of Victor, wanted to make his company the "Steinway of Talking Machines," and in many respects he succeeded.

Victor was held in such high esteem that the greatest performers and entertainers of the time would only record for the company.

The Victor Project was begun by Moran in the 1960s with his late co-author Ted Fagan, who was the principal translator for the United Nations.

Fagan got permission from Victor to access its corporate archives, resulting in numerous typed notebooks of source material, now in Moran's possession.

The first two volumes of the discography were published in 1983 and 1986 by Greenwood Press.

They remain standard reference texts on early sound recordings.

"UC Santa Barbara is an important repository for early recordings as well as archives related to the early years of the recording industry, and the Victor Project will serve to strengthen our commitment to preserve these materials for use by future generations of students and scholars," said UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang. "We are very grateful to Bill Moran for his generosity and for his dedication to documenting the American experience."

The recent gift from the retired Union Oil Company executive will enable UCSB's Special Collections to continue the editorial project, hire a discographer, and begin planning for future volumes and an online database of the recordings.

It is estimated that it will take several years to catalog the recordings that number in the hundreds of thousands, said David Seubert, curator of the Performing Arts Collection where the Victor Project will be based.

"For the first time, there will be a comprehensive index to Victor recordings produced during the first half of the 20th century," said Seubert.

"The Victor Project is inherently important because it will provide a wealth of information about American culture and history."

In addition to popular music, opera, and jazz, Victor also made ethnic recordings that included Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish cantorial music.

Victor and The Gramophone Co., its counterpart in the United Kingdom, were the first recording companies with offices all over the world.

"They were capitalists," said Seubert.

"If they thought they could sell it, they would record it, which is interesting from the perspective of corporate and industrial history."

The multi-volume work also traces the evolution of sound recording from the acoustic era that used a horn to record and reproduce sound (1900-1925), to the electric era (1925-1950) that began with the invention of the microphone.

Biographers, musicologists, sociologists, and a host of other interdisciplinary researchers will consult the reference work, including those examining musical themes, performance practice, the interplay of music and technology, textual elements, and the marketing of recordings, Seubert said.

The Victor Project will draw on primary source materials held by the UCSB Libraries, collectors, and other institutions, including the Library of Congress.

Moran traveled the world collecting 78 rpm records and researching the artists that recorded for the Victor Company.

He is the author of dozens of related articles and has written and edited several books, including biographies of singers Nellie Melba and Adelina Patti.

The distinguished discographer will serve as honorary chair of the editorial board.

His recent gift, one of the largest ever received by Special Collections, highlights the ongoing work by the UCSB Libraries to preserve recorded sound for scholars and enthusiasts.

The UCSB Libraries comprehensively collect historic recordings and have one of the largest collections of pre-World War II sound recordings in the country.

UCSB's Special Collections is recognized as a leader in the field of preservation and dissemination of early sound recordings.

Previously, Moran donated several thousand recordings to the collection.

He also assisted UCSB with the reissue of historic recordings by the late acclaimed soprano Lotte Lehmann, which were released by the UCSB Libraries in 1988.

When the discography is complete the remainder of the gift will be used to establish the William R. Moran Endowment to support historic sound recordings at UCSB.

[RCA/Victor Discography Project](#)

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.