UC SANTA BARBARA

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Shelly Leachman

Songs in the Key of Life

Traditional cakewalks and minstrel music from the late 1890s. Hymns dating back to the earliest days of the 20th century. Waltzes, whistling tunes, even language instruction. That's a small sample of the robust and growing array of historical sound recordings being preserved at UC Santa Barbara.

It was 10 years ago that the UCSB Library launched the Cylinder Preservation and Digitization Project to digitize and make available to the public its vast collection of cylinder recordings. Since that time, the audio treasury has tripled in size and set the bar for future projects like the Library of Congress' National Jukebox. It has also developed a fervent following.

A sensation among music fans from almost the moment it went live online — the library's servers crashed from a crush of visitors after the project made a splash in the news — the cylinder website has been popular from day one.

How fitting then, that on the occasion of its 10th anniversary, and with its adoring public in mind, that site has been redesigned and relaunched with enhanced compatibility and mobility, as well as improved navigation and search functions. The made-over portal is now live and ready for visitors.

And it has a new name: The UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive.

Said University Librarian Denise Stephens: "The UCSB Library is proud to share the new Cylinder Audio Archive, a demonstration of the library's ongoing commitment to building the finest recorded sound archive and making its collections accessible to

scholars and people around the world.”

The digital collection has doubled in size since its debut, now numbering more than 11,000 items. Add in items that have yet to be digitized, and the physical collection of cylinders now numbers 16,000 items — triple the original amount.

The searchable database runs the gamut of recordings made between the late 1800s and early 1900s, from popular songs, vaudeville acts, classical and operatic music to comedic monologues, ethnic and foreign recordings, speeches and readings. The archive also includes 700 vernacular wax cylinder recordings that in the spring of 2015 were added to the National Recording Registry.

Every recording in the archive is available to download or stream online for free.

“The 10th anniversary of the UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive is significant as many digital projects don’t survive this long, let alone double or triple in size,” said David Seubert, curator of the library’s Performing Arts Collection and a member of the Library of Congress’ National Recording Preservation Board. “It’s a testament to UCSB’s commitment to making our recorded heritage accessible and to the public’s ongoing interest in these materials.

“UCSB’s proven technology offers the highest quality transfers possible, at the lowest cost, with great efficiency, while preserving the integrity of the original media,” Seubert added.

The UCSB Library has also unveiled a new program designed to support the archive and its preservation for years to come. Cylinder fans and website visitors can now “adopt” a cylinder of their choosing to help the library work through recent donations awaiting digitization.

It’s a valuable investment, according to Danelle Moon, head of the library’s Department of Special Research Collections (SRC).

“Most exciting is the opportunity to engage a new generation of young scholars through this portal,” Moon said. “As we celebrate this milestone anniversary, SRC continues to curate the site and we are actively collecting in new areas that will further advance the study of sound recordings in all formats.”

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.