Ethnomusicology Collection at the University of Montana’s Anthropological Collections Facility (UMACF)

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Since 1959 UMACF has housed an extensive ethnomusicology collection, donated by cultural anthropologist Alan P. Merriam (1923-1980) of Indiana University, a native of Missoula. Professor Merriam was a cultural anthropologist and ethnomusicologist, known for his studies of the music of Africa and of Native Americans. He developed a way of studying music through an anthropological perspective and methods. He created the concept of “music as culture”. Merriam died in the LOT Polish Airlines Flight 007 accident at the age fifty-six, on March 14, 1980. Merriam donated his collection of the 78 RPM records and 11 reel-to-reel tapes to Carling Malouf (1916-2007), Professor of Anthropology at the University of Montana, who then used the collection for instructional purposes. He created an ethnomusicology course specifically for the use of these records.

My Senior Honors Research Project was to inventory the collection of 2,300 78 RPM records, as well as conduct historical background research. This will also be used for the purpose of writing grants which would be used to purchase materials that would aid in the preservation, digitization, and cataloging of the collection. Background research was undertaken to determine the meaning of the various markings on the labels and surfaces of 78 rpm records. A chart database was created to record the information. Each individual record was examined and the following data was recorded: language, culture, topic or format, performer’s name, title, record company, label color, size, engraved matrix number, serial number of label, printed matrix number, other relevant information, and side B data. This database is sortable by category.

Specific work needed would include storing the disks within paper sleeves in vertical containers, regular dusting, and cleaning of the records. Necessary supplies are cleaning solutions such as Tergitol, record sleeves, storage boxes, audiotape boxes, electric compressed air cleaner, and a digitizing turntable. Labor would include cleaning 2,300 78 rpm records as well as digitizing them. It is necessary to house the records and audio tapes to archival standards, as well as cataloging the collection in PastPerfect 5.0 (museum cataloging database). Additional work needs to be done with eleven reel-to-reel tapes, that have a museum and Northwest History Collection stamp, with a printed date of “Aug. 1950”. Tapes deteriorate over time and need to be sent to a specialized facility to be digitized. These tapes could be Merriam’s 1950 Flathead Indian Music project, irreplaceable ethnomusicological data. Even if the curation facility had a reel-to-reel player to find out what was on the tapes it would be too risky to the media to try. What is needed are grants from programs like the Preservation of Classical Music Historical Recordings.

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