Performer-centric Access to Live Music Recordings

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“Nearly every sound recording ever made is protected in some way.”

Peter Hirtle, Harvard University

Research Aims and Research Question
Two Distinct Concepts

Intellectual Property:
The current options for digitally archived music are to either sell it or lock it up and make it inaccessible. This research aims to choose the third option which is to provide ethical access by allowing the performers and copyright owners to determine how their intellectual property is used, shared, and studied.

• To make this music accessible and available for streaming
• Is ethical access a practical way of making this music accessible?

Oral History:
This project looks into the specific memories of the performers in relation with the venue, the audience, and the touring culture.

• To understand the significance of the Ark to performers
• To understand what it is like to be a performer in the folk revival

Challenges
• Multiple performers
• Deceased performers
• Multiple copyright owners
• Orphan works/unknown composers

Benefits
• Performers and audience members can relive those experiences
• The music can be studied
• The music can be enjoyed!

Background
The music was donated by The Ark to the University of Michigan. Some of the performances were digitized and spliced for both song tracks as well as talking tracks that occur between songs. Analysis has been done of what was provided (number of songs performed, number of performances for each artist, song titles, and any other documents such as programs or photos that exist). A Drupal site was designed and a prototype created. Last year, performers and/or rights owners were sent preliminary agreement form for the research project.

Interview Protocol
Following is the set of goals for the semi-structured interview protocol that was created in order to elicit metadata and memories from the performers and provide qualitative data.

• What was the folk revival scene and being a touring musician in the 60’s and 70’s looked like
• How was the Ark significant and unique to this time in music and to the performers who played there?
• How did the performer chose to interact with the audience?
• What songs did the performer write, which are traditional, and which are covers?
• Is the performer okay with the musical performance being released for online streaming at no commercial value?

Significance of This Project
• Aside from this system the only options for this music is selling or locking it up
• Gets this music to the performers for the first time ever.
• There are few recordings from live venues in this time period!
• Allows for these stories from this historical place and significant time to be heard

Results and Next Steps
I have interviewed three performers and they have all said yes to having their music available for streaming purposes. I have sent CDs to four additional performers and reached out to another two. These interviews need to be conducted and the rest of the performers/rights owners need to be reached.

During the 50th anniversary reunion a group memory interview was held and recorded at The Ark with assistance from The School of Information and David Siglin.

Once more interviews have been conducted we will analyze the transcripts and begin inputting the metadata and memories into the Drupal site and work to make the music accessible.

Analysis also needs to be done to understand how many songs performed in this initial set are in fact covers, original works, or traditional folk tunes.

Take aways about The Ark, the performers, and their music
These musicians are excited to have their music made available. Even so, copyright in regards to live performances is complex because performers often play “folk” songs (that may or may not have been copyrighted), parodies, arrangements, and original works. The Ark is one of very few venues that recorded their live performances in this time period and with this musical genre. The Ark was significant because of its small coffeehouse and community driven atmosphere. Most musicians who played The Ark knew each other and recommended each other to play there.

“If you know who wrote it-- it’s not a folk song”

-Michael Cooney

CELEBRATING 50 FOLKIN’ YEARS!