**Performer-centric Access to Live Music Recordings**

**Introduction:** Americana Music is a vibrant and popular genre, closely related to traditional folk music, with roots in bluegrass, alternative country, gospel, old time music, jug bands, Appalachian folk, blues, Cajun, and Native American music. Propelled by the folk revival of the 1960s, Americana music – best appreciated live, in intimate settings – penetrated the national cultural consciousness through a network of music clubs across the United States and Canada. The Ark in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and similar venues throughout the United States, supported legends (Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, Michael Cooney, Joe Hickerson, Norman and Nancy Blake), brilliant unknowns (Hedy West, Martin, Bogan & the Armstrong, Jay Stielstra), and local Ann Arbor musical innovators (Dick Siegel, Peter ‘Madcat’ Ruth, Barry O’Neill) alike, nurturing generations of music fans loyal not only to the musicians and the music they perform but also to the clubs themselves.

**Recordings from The Ark in Ann Arbor:** The Ark, founded in 1965, is one of the oldest and most respected acoustic music venues in the United States. The recorded performances from The Ark preserved at the University of Michigan form an extensive, nearly continuous 25 year sequence that survives on several thousand fragile and deteriorating magnetic tapes (reels and cassettes). The quality of the recordings is unusually strong – captured on fresh tape by high quality tape recorders directly from the sound mixing board. The mix of performers and distinctive performances represents a nearly complete cross section of Americana music as it was performed live over a two-decade period and a cross section of a musical touring culture of the 1970s and 1980s. Frequent repeat performances by exquisitely talented national and regional artists provide opportunities to explore how song presentation evolves over time and how similar or identical songs are rendered by performers with varying styles. Nearly all recordings of live music carry multiple layers of intellectual property complexity that create significant barriers to access. Additionally, nearly all collections of live recordings provide an incomplete understanding their contents due to the absence of comprehensive track lists and documentation of the performances. Real-time cataloging turns on real-time listening and careful analysis. Live music recordings from The Ark are no exception.

**Summer 2015 Research Project:** Five hundred hours of tape recordings have been digitized to current preservation standards. The emphasis of this research project is to explore the challenges of eliciting metadata and memories from Americana music performers represented on a selection of these digitized recordings. This research project will focus attention on several dozen performances at The Ark and engage some or all of the performers represented on the tapes to elicit metadata regarding individual songs and memories regarding the context of the performers. The research is designed to seed an online access system and discover where the opportunities and challenges reside in engaging Americana musicians in the management and release of their intellectual property. The project is an extension of a two-year project on mechanisms to overcome access barriers to live music recordings. The project builds on this prior work, but focuses attention on the quality of contributed metadata and the value added by elicited performer memories.
The research project has two interrelated components that are implemented through the use of a prototype online access system. The prototype assembles and organizes information acquired from social networks of performers and fans and provides variable and legally sound access to sound recordings (streaming) based on the rights granted by performers and songwriters or their heirs.

**Component 1: Elicit Metadata and Memories from Performers and their Communities.** The aim of the community cataloging/social memory component of this project is to draw on nested communities of performers and fans to compile a catalog of authoritative information about performers and songs at The Ark, and to bring together a body of living memory that tells the story of what music performed at The Ark meant to the people who experienced it. The project’s approach to community cataloging combines the best features of a structured cataloging system with the serendipity that results from tagging. Song titles and other elements of description that cannot be identified by the project team beforehand can make use of tagging for input. Along with the cataloging feature, the prototype features a blog-based, context sensitive forum where participants can post memories or observations about particular songs, events, or performers. This forum serves to collect community memories of The Ark and its performers as well as promoting discussion of the collection. The research question for this component concerns the extent to which the quality of contributed metadata is improved when performers are engaged. Music in the Internet Archive will serve as a control group.

**Component 2: Encourage Performers in Intellectual Property Management.** Perhaps the most innovative aspect of our project is our approach to resolving some of the intellectual property issues that profoundly limit the creative re-use of recorded live performances. This component of the project will administer and evaluate a mechanism that allows performers to review their performances and make decisions about access and the terms of re-use – perhaps *en masse*, but possibly by “program-event” or even song-by-song. The system will keep track of performer decisions and release the songs according to the rights granted. A system of online review affords a special opportunity to provide performers with exclusive access to their recordings and, at the same time, present performers with options for allowing access to and use of recordings of their performances. The research question for this component concerns measuring the proportion of content that performers can and will release for public listening.

**Expected Outcomes:** With guidance and mentoring from Associate Professor Paul Conway, the summer intern will collaborate with a group of performers from The Ark and the retired Executive Director of The Ark to engage them in eliciting metadata on performances and furthering intellectual property clearance of the songs from the performances. Data gathered on these engagements will be compiled and analyzed for patterns of quality and completeness. The intern will also compile and assess primary and secondary resources regarding the music represented in the performances and prepare parts of one or more research articles on the project. The intern will be supported by at least one other student who will be building and modifying components of the prototype access system. In addition to the research data gathered, the primary deliverable of the summer project will be a poster suitable for presentation at an academic or professional conference.