

January 26, 2007

TO: The Library of Congress and National Recording Preservation Board

RE: Request for information for the study on the current state of recorded sound preservation and restoration in the United States

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on issues concerning the restoration and preservation of recorded sound materials. The NRPB and Library's plan to develop a comprehensive national recording preservation program is encouraging. It will have a positive and far-reaching impact on the promotion of both public and private awareness of the preservation challenges that we all face.

WGBH Radio and Television serves as Boston's public broadcasting and producing station. We began programming on our FM station, 89.7, in 1951 with a live radio concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, unveiling our founders' vision of an academy of the airwaves. The station's mission was to "provide a balance of ideas and the arts to serve a wide variety of interests and needs." Four years later, WGBH Channel 2 signed on, airing the children's program, *Come and See*. Since then WGBH has expanded significantly, offering multiple radio and television channels, vibrant Web content, and a wide range of teaching tools used in classrooms from coast to coast. We are a key supplier of programming to the nation's public radio stations, and produce more of the PBS prime time television lineup and public television Web content than any other source.

On the local level, listener-supported WGBH 89.7 is Boston's National Public Radio (NPR) Arts and Culture Station, serving its diverse audience with classical music, NPR news, jazz, Celtic, and folk music. The station has been an active participant in New England's vibrant music community for more than 50 years. It currently presents and records more than 300 musical performances per year, including live broadcasts and remote recordings from venues such as Boston's Symphony Hall, the Lowell Folk Festival, the Tanglewood Jazz Festival, and WGBH's own studios.

More broadly, WGBH Radio Boston engages listeners worldwide through a rich array of audio services. WGBH produces some of public radio's most prominent programs (including *The World*, PRI's *Sound & Spirit* with Ellen Kushner, and *New Year's Day from Vienna*), as well as features for other public radio favorites. WGBH brings Boston's world-class musical performances to national audiences through collaborations with NPR and Public Radio International (PRI), and exports American contemporary music to listeners around the globe through *Art of the States*.

WGBH ARCHIVES' COLLECTION

The WGBH Media Library and Archives (MLA) is charged with acquiring, preserving and creating access to finished WGBH radio and television programs and their supporting production elements. The MLA manages a secure 1,900 sq. ft. climate controlled vault for storage of master programs and a secure space for storage of production elements and related documentation. Six full time staff, including four professional archivists, and four part-time staff manage the archival collection. The Media Library, with a staff of fourteen, provides research access and stock footage sales services for WGBH.

The WGBH media collection includes 29,095 WGBH original radio programs dating back to 1951 and a comparable number of television audiotapes dating back to 1955. These historical recorded sound materials include: spoken word, live jazz, folk and classical music concerts, dramatizations, public affairs, interviews with political, cultural and social leaders, local and national events programming and literary works such as poetry and book readings. Master radio programs are on formats ranging from 112" and 114" reels and Lps, to audiocassette, Beta, DAT, CD and .wav digital files. The Archives' recorded sound tapes generated for television series include full-length interviews and original music. Television audio can be found on a variety of formats, ranging from 2", 1", and multiple cassette videos to 16mm and 35mm film.

The WGBH collection of nearly 500,000 items is cataloged to the item level in a FileMaker Pro database, version 8.5. This database is network accessible within WGBH. Our recorded sound materials document the history of WGBH and the roots of public radio. They contain the voices and sounds of the last 60 years and are primary source material for the study of American social and cultural history, and the history of a major public broadcasting station and its technical evolution. The MLA on-line site < <http://openvault.wgbh.org> > features clips from television programs that have been preserved with grant funding.

From our inception we have been dedicated to recording the performances and interviews of musicians across a wide spectrum, from the folk music of Odetta, to jazz sessions with Luiz Henrique and Roberta Peck with the Dave Bloom Trio, to the jazz/rock fusion of Jeremy and the Satyrs. We have extensive interviews with classical music performers and composers, such as Yo-Yo Ma, Eileen Farrell, Anna Russell, Mstislav Rostropovich and Virgil Thomson. One of our wonderful early spoken word programs, *The Creative Mind*, features a series of interviews with the likes of Agnes de Mille, Ben Shahn, Frank Lloyd Wright, Margaret Mead and others. A related series, *The Creative Mind*, features extensive interviews with Lee Strassberg, Edward Steichen, Richard Tucker, and others.

Our 60-year recording history has been enlivened by a number of poetry and book reading programs. Perhaps the most important adult book program was *Rending Aloud*, which debuted in 1958 and over the years regaled its listeners with the prose of Dickens, Tolkein, Pasternak, de Cervantes, Alcott, C.S. Lewis, Sayers and Mowat, among many others. Beginning in 1970, *The Spider's Web* was able to captivate a youthful audience across the country with readings of children's classics. See <<http://forum.wgbh.org/wgbh/forum.php?category=Literature> > for readings of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and *Wind in the Willows*. These programs were

preserved to be made accessible online.

WGBH has always been active in the greater Boston community and with our academic and cultural institutions, broadcasting and taping live lectures, celebrations and other public events. In 1967 we taped a community lecture series featuring eminent scholars of American black history entitled, *The Negro in America*. In 1975, our *Panrechnicon* (meaning bazaar) series began as a long running radio magazine where artistic and creative people shared their ideas on current events and trends.

These are but a few examples from the recorded sound collection of WGBH. Our sister stations from across the country are also treasure troves of FM programs and other recorded sound materials. These collections offer the nation an extraordinarily rich and diverse audio history of culture and public affairs.

WGBH PRESERVATION EFFORTS AND ACCESS

WGBH FM and the Archives work collaboratively to preserve WGBH radio programming. Preservation of recorded sound and programming at WGBH is almost completely driven by grant funding.

Prioritizing for preservation takes into consideration the following criteria: 1) age of material; 2) potential for re-broadcast or re-use as reference content; 3) importance of subject and talent; 4) historical value to the institution.

WGBH FM has professional equipment and experienced engineers to manage our preservation efforts. FM maintains 114" and 112" audio decks, a state of the art digital recording studio and a staff of professionals who, with grant funding, are able to process FM programming for preservation. The preservation process strives to adhere to recommended procedures outlined in the March 2006 *Capturing Analog Sounds for Digital Preservation: Report of a Roundtable Discussion of Best Practices for Transferring Analog Discs and Tapes*. Such publications from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and the Library of Congress are critically important references and resources that guide individual archives in their preservation efforts.

The WGBH preservation process consists of an initial baking (in a convection oven) if required, the original analog tape, followed by tape cleaning and then digitizing and transfer to CD for access purposes, and to 24-bit, 96 kHz .wav digital audio files. The digital files are stored in the WGBH digital asset management system (Artesia/TEAMS) and will be migrated to our trusted digital repository when it is fully developed. The original analog tapes are returned to the climate-controlled vault where they will be kept indefinitely.

In-house staff are the primary users of recorded sound materials from the Archives. However, the WGBH Media Library and Archives regularly provides access to external scholars and students with one-day advance notice.

MAJOR ISSUES FOR RECORDED SOUND PRESERVATION

#1 What drives preservation prioritizing of preservation efforts at WGBH?

The perspective of WGBH 89.7 FM operations on preservation is that utility and cultural value must be viewed as two sides of the same coin. Preservation would be, in practice, an endless project without informed prioritization of materials. While cultural value might seem the preeminent criteria, its importance to preservation can only be understood in conjunction with other factors, such as utility, accessibility and fundability. Some practical guides to prioritization include: that the tape has significant air-ability or potential online accessibility, that it is likely to be of programmatic interest, that it has been requested by a programmer or an outside party. Discrete projects that are potentially "packageable" are also attractive preservation targets. Projects that have an internal integrity are more compelling than fragmentary or singular oddities. In short, FM will take advantage of the multiple opportunities presented by archival recordings once they are preserved.

Of course, history and current events often surpass all policy considerations. Several years ago, FM discovered a collection of original audiotapes in our Archives that had been recorded on site at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The original cataloging did not identify the unique audio on these reels. Only after listening to the many hours of 1 1/4" tape was it determined that we had a full recording of the Educational Radio Network's broadcast of the day's events. We were able to clean, digitize and transfer these tapes for preservation and to subsequently use this content in a WGBH program celebrating the 40th anniversary of this milestone event.

Institutional policy at WGBH mandates that television and radio productions deliver defined production materials to the Archives immediately upon shutdown, or on a scheduled basis. Besides a master copy of the program, required production elements include, but are not limited to: original sound recordings, original footage, interviews, transcripts, and logs to tapes. This policy assures that the Archives receive these materials in a timely manner and that productions meet in-house deliverable requirements that specify recording format and version.

When selecting materials for preservation, the Archives carefully reviews FM's input on specific parameters related to the tape or tape series: 1) utility-does it have potential program value; 2) accessibility-are there potential obstructions to access; and 3) fundability-is funding available and adequate for reformatting and preservation.

According to this consultation, the items are then prioritized, taking account of the following value categories:

1. Re-use value calculates the potential for future reference, research and re-broadcasts.
2. Information value includes the amount of cataloging information we have about the program or element content. Information value increases if we know all the names of program talent, works performed, subjects discussed, etc. If we have information from press clips about the

program's reception, this adds to the informational value.

3. Institutional values include the program genre, date of broadcast, season, program number, production staff and whether this was produced for a local or national audience. Additional values are: do we own the rights to the material. what were the original funding sources: did this program win any awards; and does the program reflect unique or first time technical initiatives such as the first production in stereo.

Finally, preservation of recorded sound at WGBH is basically dependent on grant funding. Internal funding is neither substantial nor consistent from year to year.

#2 Is WGBH preservation program designed to be sustained for the long- term?

At the current time, WGBH does not have a long-term preservation plan. Rather our preservation is motivated by the above selection procedures and format standards. WGBH does have a digital asset management system (Artesia/TEAMS). During the preservation transfer process we are creating a digital audio file to ingest into our developing trusted repository that meets the guidelines as specified by RLG.

#3 What does WGBH see a s potential for partnerships and collaborations within or between the public and private sectors to support preservation?

At the local level, WGBH has long collaborated with both public and private institutions, resulting in a fount of recordings that exist only in the WGBH Archives. These unique recordings present many opportunities for collaboration, as long as it can be demonstrated that the institutions have an interest in WGBH preserving them. On the music side, collaborative ventures could include the preservation of vintage recordings with Boston's Handel & Haydn Society, the Boston Early Music Festival, the Boston Conservatory, and many others. In the area of the spoken word, WGBH has been recording lectures since the 1950's in conjunction with many of our local academic and cultural institutions. These include recordings of internationally important figures who spoke at Harvard, Tufts, Brandeis and other schools, or as part of the Ford Hall Forum series of the Eastern Education Radio Network (EERN) forums.

As mentioned earlier, WGBH has a long history of recording and broadcasting Boston Symphony Orchestra concerts on both radio and television. Currently the WGBH Archives is collaborating with the Boston Symphony Orchestra Archives on a major preservation effort to preserve early recordings of specific BSO conductors.

Nationally there are potential archival collections at hundreds of public radio and television stations. The collections constitute a rich and unique resource of recorded sound of local and national historical significance. These recorded sound collections can only be appraised and systematically preserved through determined and collaborative efforts by public broadcasting stations i n concert with interested funders and, hopefully, the Library of Congress. A nationally sanctioned and recognized initiative would greatly aid in negotiating the significant challenges ahead, which include: 1. meeting the costs of preserving recorded sound; 2. developing

systematic selection guidelines for preservation; 3 . coming to a common agreement on the conflicting preservation and access formats and standards; 4. raising awareness of the preservation needs with manufacturers, vendors, and non-federal funding organizations.

#4 What effects of U. S. law governing copyright and fair use on preservation and access.

We have no specific comments at this point.

#5 What are creative solutions that would overcome obstacles to preservation?

The current Smithsonian Institution's Folkways recordings available for a fee, presents an interesting concept. It would be helpful to know more about this tool, as it might be a model for other non-profit institutions to consider for replication.

#6 What are preservation issues that may be receiving insufficient attention?

1. There are many archivists, librarians and others whose major collecting focus is on textual materials and only tangentially on recorded sound materials. As a result. professionals are eager for solid and up-to-date information on the care, management and preservation of recorded sound formats. 2. The facts regarding life expectancy (le) of newer tape formats, such as DAT, and digital files should be made more available to archivists, librarians and other professionals and to the general public. 3. The profession should identify strategies for developing relationships with vendors who are willing to work on long-term digital or physical formats for preservation. 4. The profession should coordinate and work closely with membership, standards and advocacy groups such as the Association of Recorded Sound, the Audio Engineering Society and related professional groups to encourage preservation support and funding. 5 . We should give greater public recognition of the private and public foundations, organizations, agencies and individuals currently supporting recorded sound preservation efforts.

#7 How can public consciousness be raised about the importance of dedicating public and private resources to recorded sound preservation'?

The following ideas could be considered as ways to increase the public consciousness about preservation of recorded sound. 1. The model of the successful Home Movie Day <http://www.homemovieday.com/> might be replicated to raise public consciousness about recorded sound preservation. 2. Recognition within the nation's schools of the annual additions to the National Recording Preservation Board's registry might plant the seed about the importance of preservation. On-line access to these recordings and a short curriculum outline for selected age groups would be an added benefit. 3. Support for non-profit institutions to develop and implement protected on-line access to historical recordings should be encouraged. This is not only for the public's benefit as a direct link to their historical past, but a great tie-in with schools for students to access primary source materials.

We appreciate the tremendous preservation leadership and work of the Library of Congress and the National Recordings Preservation Board.