Moses Asch and His Encyclopedia of Sound: Digitizing the Moses and Frances Asch Collection
Nicole Horstman, Fall 2013

Why Digitize the Asch Collection?

• Physical Degradation
  • Audio: flaking acetate, “sticky-shed” syndrome
  • Paper: mold, brittle/fragile materials

• Broad digitization will help identify and ameliorate these issues in problematic materials

• High research value
  • Much of the materials are “invisible”; digitization will help researchers locate and utilize relevant items

Folkways Records was founded in 1948. Led by Moses Asch (1905-1986), Folkways sought to document the entire world of sound. The 2,168 titles Asch released on Folkways include traditional and contemporary music from around the world, spoken word in many languages, and documentary recordings of individuals, communities, and current events. Folkways grew to be one of the most influential ethnographic record labels in the world. Folkways Records and the label’s business papers and files were acquired by the Smithsonian Institution in 1987, and every recording is kept in print.

Project Goals

• Scan ~196 linear feet of papers, photographs, artwork, and scrapbooks

• Digitize 500 glass acetate discs and 1000 reel-to-reel tapes

• Establish standards that will be sustainable beyond the life of the grant

• Make digital surrogates available to researchers

At left: Materials from the Production files, including (clockwise from top left): contracts, liner notes, photographic materials, label copy, liner note drafts, and label proof

At right: Screenshot of records entries in Archivists’ Toolkit

At left: Records storage boxes of the Moses and Frances Asch Collection at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

At right: Screenshot of metadata tagging in Adobe Bridge

FOLKWAYS Records.
AND SERVICE CORP., 701 Seventh Ave. N.Y.C.
Long Playing Non-Breakable Micro Groove 33 1/2 RPM

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The Moses and Frances Asch Collection
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The Asch Collection includes:
Band 1 Recordings owned by and produced by Moses Asch (acetate disc, 78s, LPs)
Band 2 Master tapes for Folkways Records
Band 3 LPs for most of the 2168 titles released by Folkways Records
Band 4 Business papers and Correspondence
Band 5 Folkways records and labels
Band 6 The Woody Guthrie Papers (described separately)
Band 7 Photographs