

UT iSchool :: Survey of Digitization, Fall 2008

Tuesday, October 21, 2008

Claire B. Blog 6: Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings



The [Strachwitz Frontera Collection](#) of commercially produced Mexican and Mexican-American Recordings (the Frontera Collection) is owned by the Arhoolie Foundation, which was established to preserve regional vernacular music created in the United States. Some of the collection has been digitized, but the project is still underway. The Arhoolie Foundation in El

Cerrito, California is managing the project, and the UCLA Music Library hosts. The UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center is heavily involved as well with arranging funding and, presumably, tailoring the digitization project for specific audiences.

Collection Principles

This collection is the largest repository of Mexican and Mexican-American vernacular recordings in existence, and contains many one-of-a-kind recordings whose publishing companies no longer exist or, if they do, lost or melted their metal masters in the earlier twentieth century. The UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center is digitizing the first section of the collection, consisting of 78 rpm phonograph recordings. Once in digital format, this vast collection of approximately 30,000 performances, primarily in Spanish, recorded during the first half of the twentieth century, predominantly in the United States and Mexico, will be available to researchers and the general public.

Digitization began on October 15, 2001. The production team first cataloged the entire collection of over 100,000 individual recordings on cassettes and 78 rpm, 45 rpm, and 33 1/3 rpm long-playing (lp) records using "specialized equipment" (not sure what, exactly).

The Strachwitz Frontera Collection contains three sections, roughly divided by era. The early-twentieth century section includes approximately twelve thousand 78 rpm recordings of Mexican vernacular music recorded from around 1905 to 1955. These performances document many types of popular lyric songs, including the first recordings of corridos (narrative ballads on topics of the day), canciones, boleros, rancheras, and sones, as well as many types of instrumental music, including the first recordings of norteño and conjunto music. In addition, this section includes many spoken performances, such as patriotic speeches and vernacular comedy skits. The late-twentieth century section contains approximately fourteen thousand 45 rpm recordings dating from around 1955 to the 1990s. These include recordings by a wide range of small regional firms created to serve the musical interests of the growing immigrant population in the United States, especially along the border. The last section of the collection includes approximately three thousand 33 1/3 rpm recordings from around 1955 to 1990, demonstrating the continuity of styles and regional traditions into contemporary times.