John Spencer, Notes from CWG meeting 3/5/14

Recorded Sound Issues –

2 types – consumer formats (from wax cylinders to CDs) and professional formats (multitrack), used to create consumer products – NOTE my personal focus is on professional formats

HISTORY

With consumer formats, there are "pockets" of knowledge – within LofC, Universities, and large archives that have capable staff and competent equipment, also several companies that specialize in the digital migration of these items.

The sheer number of holdings and no accurate/ complete database of what has/ has not been migrated, compounded with limited funding sources for migration projects, means that funding may go to redundant projects.

(also mention copyright issues – example Starr Gennett migration project of 78s that was stopped by Concord Records to make them available on a streaming website)

the professional recording industry remains at a crossroads

from a myriad of analog formats, to presently ZERO manufacturers of tape machines and only 2 small analog tape manufacturers

also only a handful of technicians and companies capable of "re-lapping" (creating new) play-back heads, and the group of knowledge and talent is diminishing

same with digital "tape-based" recorders – 2 main formats (DASH and PD), both now obsolete, no parts available, no companies can "re-lap" heads, probably under 100 working machines worldwide

with the beginning of HDD recording, disks had little capacity and were very expensive, so the industry started the cycle of using various types (many proprietary, and many companies no longer in business) of backup devices, writing to tape, optical media, etc., many of which are at a high risk of recovery, or no recovery at all.

-(mention the CCM recording industry – 2" analog, locked to low-cost digital recorders, linked to MIDI synthesizers that were triggered during playback and mixdown but NEVER printed to tape, THESE WILL NEVER BE RECOVERED)

Now there are high-capacity HDDs, the general user has become more comfortable making the assumption that the potential life of the HDD will be longer (this is

usually based on whether the user has ever experienced a drive failure!) – however, the trend continues – an ill-founded assumption that these HDDs are somehow LESS prone to failure, continues to keep archival material "at-risk"

The typical record label vaulting methodology is "object-based", when clearly born-digital material should be considered "asset-based". There is a distinct mindset for commercial music companies as to how recorded music is handled in the vault – for example, there has been a general thought within the industry – the 80/20 rule – that typically 80% of recorded music projects do not recover their initial cost to create, while the 20% that are profitable allow the label to "re-invest" into new recording projects. The emphasis on the 20% of projects that have "recouped" their investment may be treated in a different way.

"independent artists/ labels" usually have no meaningful IT skills, I just saw in a recent recording publication the concept of "making a backup HDD and putting it on the shelf (we just received a project yesterday, the only drive of the entire recording session, and it will NOT mount)

A "clarion horn" needs to be sounded in as many ways as possible – NARAS/ AES/ musicbiz.org (formerly NARM) are all trying to do this

METADATA

Note how most users (many on this call) probably bought albums, read all of the liner notes, viewed the cover art, and were drawn to read this bit of information because it made us feel like we were a part of the process

In many cases, the early days of analog recording provided us with more metadata than is collected these days. The use of "track-sheets", tape-box labels, etc., at least gives the archivist an idea of what material they actually have.

Digital recording, on the other hand, provides little in the way of metadata

DDEX standards are making more inroads into the subscription/ digital download market, and the standardization of technical/ descriptive/ performer-role work being done in the Studio Metadata WG will help create richer metadata for consumers

FILM/ VIDEO

Video – same set of issues that basically exist with proprietary music recording equipment, no longer manufactured, but a larger base of machines that can still be used for parts

Digital cameras – formats, codecs, same problem as above. Ticking time bomb waiting to happen

GOALS
Can we ever get to a more comprehensive set of holdings of consumer material that has been digitized?

As the realtor says, education, education, education – there remains still not enough knowledge within the community to understand the ramifications of new digital recordings

Again, standards as well, and the knowledge that these standards do exist is an important component to moving to a more stable and reliable archival environment

PROGRESS

I can say that I've personally seen positive motion from record labels to begin to move their systems to "asset-based" repositories, collecting metadata at the point of creation

New NARAS Delivery Guidelines document is out as of a few months ago

Continued implementation of DDEX standards is a boon for content owners and content consumers