



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Ralph Rinzler Interview, 1993

by Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., <i>osiaref@si.edu</i>
Creator:	Rinzler, Ralph. interviewee
Title:	Ralph Rinzler Interview
Dates:	1993
Quantity:	2 videotapes (reference copies).

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9569, Rinzler, Ralph. interviewee, Ralph Rinzler Interview

Historical Note

Ralph Carter Rinzler (1934-1994) was born in Passaic, New Jersey, and was interested in music at an early age. He was given a collection of ethnographic recordings from the Archive of Folk Song of the Library of Congress by his uncle, Harvard University ballad scholar George Lyman Kittredge, and they soon became his favorites. He became actively involved in folk music while attending Swarthmore College, organizing an annual folk festival on campus. He received his B.A. in 1956, and did graduate work at Middlebury College and the Sorbonne in French literature and language. Upon his return to the United States, he played mandolin for four years with the Greenbriar Boys, touring with singer Joan Baez. During the 1960s, he also studied and worked with performers of traditional music, such as Doc Watson and Bill Monroe, both of whom gained international recognition, in part through his efforts. In 1964, Rinzler accepted the position of Director of Field Programs at the Newport Folk Foundation. Rinzler came to the Smithsonian in 1967 as the founding Director of what is now the Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, then in the Division of Performing Arts, to establish a center for research, publication, and presentation of programs in American subcultures. As Director, he also developed the annual Festival of American Folklife. After the summer-long festival of 1976, he initiated Smithsonian Folklife Studies, a publication series, and did research for the Celebration exhibit, which opened at the Renwick Gallery in 1982. Rinzler was appointed Assistant Secretary for Public Service in 1983 and Assistant Secretary Emeritus in 1990.

Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives began its Oral History Program in 1973. The purpose of the program is to supplement the written documentation of the Archives' record and manuscript collections with an Oral History Collection, focusing on the history of the Institution, research by its scholars, and contributions of its staff. Program staff conduct interviews with current and retired Smithsonian staff and others who have

made significant contributions to the Institution. There are also interviews conducted by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Rinzler was interviewed for the Oral History Collection because of his distinguished career as the founder of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, as well as a Smithsonian administrator. Additional information about Rinzler can be found in the the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections in the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Descriptive Entry

The interview of Rinzler, with friend and colleague Roger D. Abrahams, by Marc Pachter, Acting Assistant Secretary for External Affairs, covers his early life and interest in music; involvement in the folk music scene at Swarthmore and organization of the festival there; time spent in London after graduate courses; life on the road with Joan Baez; work with Doc Watson, Bill Monroe, and others; field work for the Newport Foundation; beginnings of the Folklife Festival at the Smithsonian and his subsequent career at the Institution. It also includes reminiscences of many individuals at the Smithsonian and in the larger folklife community, including S. Dillon Ripley, Frank A. Taylor, Charles Blitzler, David Challinor, Robert McC. Adams, Michael Seeger, Peggy Seeger, and Alan Lomax; and discusses the rise of the folklife movement including the political and ethnological forces behind the movement. The interview consist of 2.5 hours of videotape, 94 pages of transcript, and occupy 0.5 linear meters of shelf space, with 5 original Betacam videotapes, 3 U-matic copy master videotapes, and 2 VHS reference videocassettes. Box 1 contains transcripts of the interviews and VHS cassette copies of the original videotape recordings, which are in security storage.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Art
Folklife studies
Music
Performing arts.

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Oral history
Videotapes

Names:

Abrahams, Roger D. interviewer.
Adams, Robert McCormick, 1926-
Archive of Folk Song. Library of Congress.
Assistant Secretary for Public Service
Baez, Joan

Blitzer, Charles
Celebrations, 1982 (Exhibit)
Challinor, David.
Division of Performing Arts
Festival of American Folklife
Greenbriar Boys
Lomax, Alan, 1915-
Monroe, Bill, 1911-1996
Newport Folk Foundation.
Pachter, Marc interviewer.
Rinzler, Ralph.
Ripley, Sidney Dillon, 1913-2001
Seeger, Mike, 1933-
Seeger, Peggy, 1935-
Smithsonian Folklife Studies.
Smithsonian Institution. Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies
Swarthmore College
Taylor, Frank A. (Frank Augustus), 1903-
Watson, Doc

Container Listing

Box 1

Transcript of Interview

Interview 1: 9 July 1993:

Video Recordings of Interview

Interview 1: 9 July 1993: