Transforming the Comhaltas Traditional Music Archive
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This presentation outlines the development of the Comhaltas Traditional Music Archive, a new internet-based resource. Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann is a large non-profit organisation involved in the preservation and promotion of Irish traditional culture. Through music classes, festivals and a world-wide network of branches, Comhaltas works to preserve Irish cultural traditions and transmit them to the next generation. For the last fifty years Comhaltas has slowly collected a heterogeneous music archive, including a large number of original audio and video field recordings. Classifying and presenting this material has been a challenge, as Irish and other primary oral artifacts do not fit perfectly within the hierarchal framework of library subject headings. Geographic associations, performers, tune titles and song settings all have a degree of "fuzziness" built in, and the eventual researcher may have access to more contextual information than the archivist. Given this reality, Comhaltas decided to create an internet-based archive platform that encourages researchers and students to add their own annotations and commentary to the source material. In addition, Comhaltas looked at new ways to group the collection, applying principles of "ambient findability" to create dynamic paths through related content. Like all audiovisual archives, the Comhaltas archive struggles with balancing copyright and ethical requirements with the remit of broad public access. In particular, Comhaltas has formulated organisational policies cognisant of the unique role of Irish other primary oral cultures within the intellectual property spectrum. And given the close ties between the source musicians and the organisation, Comhaltas has considered artist reputations of primary concern in deciding such an access policy. This paper will present audio and video examples from the collection, explaining how particular classification, encoding, indexing and distribution challenges were met to create a community-driven archive.