

"Virtual Archive" - a platform for discographical data and access small and private record collections

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Historic sound documents on cylinders and records are not only archived in the large national sound archives. The majority of them are kept with small archives and private collectors. In their collections a lot of very interesting recordings with large historic and artistic importance can be found, which would not be available at the national archives. Unfortunately the access to these small and private archives is very difficult and very often impossible. Moreover there are very few inventory lists according the discographic rules available and nobody besides the collector himself has an overview of his inventory. One target of the discographic project of the GHT (Gesellschaft fuer Historische Tontraeger, Wien) is to create a 'Virtual Archive' of historic recordings. With the help of the latest internet technology it is possible to offer such a 'Virtual Sound Archive' to all interested people. In the approach of the GHT we are both collecting discographic data coming from recording ledgers, original catalogues and real available recordings. In case of physical available recordings both the label is scanned and the sound is digitally recorded. All this information is stored in the proprietary database GHT-BASE. This database can directly export its content including all discographic information, label scan and sound into the DISMARC platform (www.dismarc.org) in the internet and is then easily accessible by everybody. With this principle it can be made possible to create a real 'sounding' discography which can give much more information rather than only a listing of made records. The basic data are coming from a lot of individual collectors and small archives. The GHT consolidates all this information into GHT-BASE. Also with this step there is an anonymization of the supplier of the information who very often wants to be not named for having a specific record in his collection. An additional benefit of this principle is the easy access to the content of a collection without bringing the valuable original record in danger of an unqualified use of persons not having enough background knowledge how to reproduce shellac records. GHT-BASE is a discographic database strictly optimized for the use with shellac records. It is also capable for handling information of re-issues on LP/CD. It is still under development and a lot of further enhancements are planned especially in the area of a virtual multi user interworking. An open issue is still the copyright question when publishing content which is not old enough to be beyond protection. All shellac records are now outside the copyright of the record manufacturer (50 years) but for some musicians the required 70 years after death are not yet over. On the other side there is only a limited public interest in such kind of recordings. Since most of the listeners have a discographic or scientific interest in these recordings, the access should kept free.