



Audio Engineering Society – New York Section

NEWSLETTER – MEETING NOTICE

**2009-2010
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**Tuesday February 16th, 2010, Join us for a Meet & Greet at 6:30pm
Presentation at 7:00pm**

**Hearst Corporation Tower
Joseph Urban Theater
300 West 57th Street
New York, NY 10021**

Worlds of Sound: The Ballad of Folkways

Moderator: Roger Johansen - Tangerine Mastering

Presenters: Richard Carlin - Author of the book "Worlds of Sound" and Consultant to the film ; **Andrea Kalin** - Filmmaker, "Worlds of Sound"



L-R: Moses Asch, Sonny Terry, and Brownie McGhee in 1958

Worlds of Sound: The Ballad of Folkways, is a documentary film about Moses Asch and the 60-year history of Smithsonian Folkways Records. Folkways Records founder Moses Asch turned the music business model on its head. He avoided hit makers and catered to unknown musicians. He dug into vanishing traditions around the world to harness music and sounds that inspire people. Artists like Woody Guthrie and Lead Belly can still be heard on this original indie label with the mission of gathering sound and spreading it to the people.

Worlds of Sound explores the powerful chords of this musical inheritance. With longtime Folkways producer Richard Carlin and others, the film takes viewers through the Folkways story, from the passion of founder Moses Asch to the New York Jazz scene in the 1940s, to the 60s counter-culture and its folk heroes. The film introduces us afresh to Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and others at the front of the Blues and Folk revivals: names like Lead Belly, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGee, and Lightnin' Hopkins.

We will be screening *Worlds of Sound* in the excellent facilities of the Joseph Urban Theatre. Afterwards, Richard Carlin and filmmaker Andrea Kalin will be on hand to talk about the history of Folkways Records and the making of the documentary.

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"Worlds of Sound" documentary presented at AES New York Section meeting report



Pictured L-R: Robert Auld, Richard Carlin and Roger Johansen

On Tuesday, February 16, 2010, the AES New York Section presented a program dedicated to the history of Smithsonian Folkways Records, featuring former Folkways producer and author Richard Carlin. Mastering engineer Roger Johansen hosted the meeting, which was held at the Joseph Urban Theater in the Hearst Corporation Tower.

The bulk of the meeting was devoted to viewing the documentary film "Worlds of Sound" which is based on Richard Carlin's book of the same name, about the history of Folkways Records and its founder, Moses Asch. After the film, Carlin spoke about what it was like working with Asch for this unique record label.

Moses Asch first started producing records in 1940, with intermittent success, until an attempt at producing a hit with Nat "King" Cole in 1946 literally bankrupted him. This harsh lesson caused Asch to turn away from the business of commercial hit making. Instead, in 1948 he founded the Folkways label, with the goal of documenting and recording all the sounds of his time. The Folkways catalog grew to include a myriad of voices, from world- and roots-music to political speeches; the voices of contemporary poets and steam engines; folk singers Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie and jazz pianists Mary Lou Williams and James P. Johnson; Haitian vodoun singers and Javanese court musicians; deep sea sounds and sounds from the outer ring of Earth's atmosphere. Until his death in 1986, Asch--with the help of collaborators ranging from the eccentric visionary Harry Smith to academic musicologists--created more than 2,000 albums, a sound-scape of the contemporary world still unequalled in breadth and scope.

Richard Carlin vividly related to the meeting how Asch was able to do all this on shoe-string budgets (a typical album might cost \$200). While Asch had been trained as a radio engineer in Germany in the 1920's, he seemed to have a basic mistrust of any but the most basic of audio technology. For example, Carlin produced an album with a stereo master tape. Asch then issued the record in monophonic sound. When Carlin asked him why, Asch replied, "stereo is a lie." Almost all Folkways albums were mono LPs, recorded with very simple techniques--single microphone pickup was the norm. There were occasional exceptions--a handful of quadraphonic records were released in the 1970's--but normally, Asch did not even trust the "hi-fi" techniques of 1950's mono, believing that they falsified the sounds produced by artists he recorded.

The meeting concluded with questions for author Carlin from the audience of about 60 people.

Report by Robert Auld