

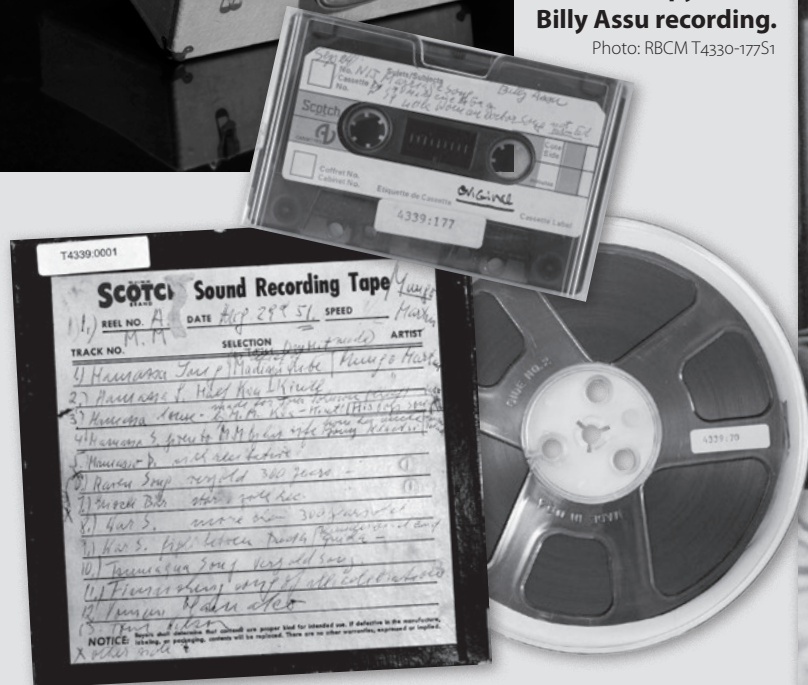


Turntable.

Photo: RBCM 2013C1009016P

Cassette copy of Billy Assu recording.

Photo: RBCM T4330-177S1



Original sound recording tape case and Halpern audio reel from Mungo Martin sessions, 1951.

Photo: RBCM T4339-001F



Ida Halpern at home in Vancouver.

Photo: RBCM J-00538

Indigenous Songs of the Northwest Coast

The Ida Halpern fonds

Genevieve Weber

The Ida Halpern fonds is a remarkable collection of audiovisual, textual, and photographic records documenting the songs, ceremonies, and culture of the northwest coast of Canada.

Between the 1940s and 1980s, ethnomusicologist Ida Halpern captured an unprecedented quantity of sound recordings of cultural creations from leading Elders in Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuuchah-nulth, Haida, and Coast Salish communities. Her textual records include musical analyses of the songs and a wealth of information about the ceremonies derived from interviews with the Elders involved in the recordings.

Singers recorded by Halpern include Mungo Martin (Nakapenkem or Datsa), Pasala (Chief Billy Assu), George Clutesi, Florence Edenshaw Davidson, Gertrude Kelley, Tom Willie, Peter Webster, Joe

Titian, Dan Cranmer, Stanley Hunt, Fred Lewis, Ella Thompson, Louis Miranda, Chief Adam Shewish, and Margaret Shewish.

Many Elders and singers recorded by Halpern were willing to offer songs, naming ceremonies, and other musical creations because they recognized the devastating impact racist government policies such as the potlatch ban and enforced assimilation via residential school education were having on the younger generations. Halpern understood that she was being entrusted with these important songs so that future generations would be able to learn them again. These recordings are invaluable to the families and communities who hold the intellectual rights to the songs and ceremonies. They are also vital as potential tools in



Transcription of song "Madam."

Source: RBCM AAAB7428-38T



Ida Halpern at home in Vancouver.

Photo RBCM J-00616

language revitalization efforts and as evidence of the unique, enduring coastal cultures.

When Halpern donated her records to the Provincial Archives of BC in 1984, she included conditions on access and use of the material with the donation agreement. The agreement was unusual for the time, explicitly acknowledging that the existence of the collection was only possible due to the trust granted her by the Indigenous owners of the songs. The agreement stipulated that the main purpose of the recordings was to "preserve and foster the cultural integrity" of the collection for future generations of singers.

Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration of

the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states:

"Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions...[and] the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions." Therefore, Indigenous communities hold rights to the songs recorded by Halpern, and it is the responsibility of the Royal BC Museum to facilitate these rights.

Although the Royal BC Museum has been entrusted to care for the physical objects—the tape reels, sound discs, and master digital copies—we recognize that the songs and the information they hold belong to the singers, their descendants, and their communities. We have been working with some descendants to find ways to formally identify and acknowledge the owners and rights holders to the songs, and to empower the communities to fully control who can access and use them. We intend to continue this work until we have connected with all the communities represented in the collection. ■



Genevieve Weber is the Acting Head of Archives at the Royal BC Museum. As an outreach archivist and community liaison for the archives, Genevieve has had the privilege of working with Indigenous communities from all over the province, assisting with research requests, providing access to records, and facilitating workshops on topics such as researching community history and Indigenous genealogy. She is passionate about engaging people of all ages with the archives, and enjoys public speaking.