John Fenn
Welcome to Folklife today. I'm John Fenn, the head of Research and Programs at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. I'm being joined by my usual co-host, Steve Winick, who is a folklife specialist at the center and the creator of the Folklife Today blog and podcast.

Stephen Winick
That's right. And as summer has just ended, so our annual Homegrown concert series is also coming to a close. So we thought we'd take a look back at this year's 2021 Homegrown at Home concert series, which we've had great fun producing. And speaking of producing, we're being joined right now by Thea Austen, who is the producer of the series, and a little later by our two Bartis interns whose internships were funded by our late colleague and friend, Peter Bartis.

John Fenn
Indeed, in such a great way to honor his legacy and also include our interns. But for right now let's all welcome the American Folklife Center’s public events coordinator, who makes all of our programs happen, Thea Austen.

Theadocia Austen
Hello, I'm very happy to be here talking with you guys today.

John Fenn
Always great to have you on the podcast here. So um, this is the second year that we have proceeded with a pandemic version of the Homegrown concert series. How do these concerts differ from what we usually offer on site through the Homegrown series?

Theadocia Austen
Well, you know, we always love to have artists visit the library; sing in historic Coolidge auditorium with incredible acoustics; visit the AFC collections, which are amazing, and so inspiring to a lot of musicians, both amateur and professional. But we haven't been able to do that. But we have wanted to continue to support musicians in this very difficult time when a lot of people have lost gigs and certainly a lot of a lot of money
supporting their lives. So that’s something that was very important to us to continue to give support, we also were able to ask them to give us a sense of place and cultural context for the music. When they sing on a proscenium stage, you’re limited to, you know, that particular setting and words that can paint pictures and describe some of the context for the songs. But with videos, in some of these places, we’ve been able to get, you know, clips of the scenery, you know, images of Corsica, images of Georgia. And it gives us cultural context to get a sense of where this music comes from. And it’s, it’s so enriching, it’s, it’s very, very interesting. And audiences have really responded to it, I think.

Stephen Winick
Yeah, you mentioned those concerts that have shots of the scenery. And we’ve we’ve actually got drone footage, as you said, of, of Corsica, and of Georgia, and some of Wales as well for the concert by Vri, which is a great concert in our series. So I’ll just remind folks that we’re calling these “Homegrown at Home,” you know, because we hope that you’ll feel at home watching musicians who feel at home. We knew the musicians weren’t always recording their videos at their specific homes, but they’re...it’s a place where they feel at home. So Thea, what was the process like booking these concerts and working with the artists to get them done?

Theadocia Austen
Well, you know, a lot of it has to be electronically. Zoom meetings, working with partners. We worked with the Finnish embassy to present two of our Finnish artists, which by the way, also had great footage of Finland very cold really gives you a sense of both the Sami homeland we had a Sami artist and—and winter in Finland. So we worked with partners, we also it’s...it’s unfortunate that we can’t actually meet people in person, but by constant communication, it feels like we’ve gotten to know them. And we look forward to a time when hopefully, we can actually meet some of these folks in person. So constant communication is really...is really the key.

John Fenn
Indeed. And as for the logistics for the viewer, the concerts premiere on our Facebook page every other Wednesday at noon. At the same time they go live on the concert pages of loc.gov and on the library’s YouTube channel, so viewers can watch them in any of those places starting noon on the concert day or afterwards. But the advantage of catching the premiere is that the artists are often there in the chat to greet the audience to answer
questions and just to learn more about each other. Now to catch that, go to facebook.com/americanfolklifecenter, all one word, and then you look for the top post which should say AFC plans to go live. And at noon on a given Wednesday, a button would appear that says watch live and then a viewer would click it. Um, but the great thing again is that once it airs, it's it's live forever on the web and YouTube. So to catch all of the past concerts, just go to loc.gov/concerts/folklife, where you can find the 2021 and the 2020 season.

Theadocia Austen
You know, I also want to just give a shout out to all of the colleagues that have helped us. Other producers, other friends who've recommended artists, Folk Alliance International, we went to a conference and saw, as, you know, several performers there. So, all of these people, you know, it does take a village to put together a series.

Stephen Winick
Absolutely, yeah, a lot of those people were really, really helpful, and we wouldn't have been able to do it without them. So which of these concerts have most stood out for you Thea and why?

Theadocia Austen
Oh, gosh, you know, it is so hard. I love them all. I have to say that many of them have brought me to tears. One in particular that comes to mind is the Bulgarian concert featuring one of absolutely the greatest living traditional singers today in Bulgaria, Neli Andreeva. Again, she's one of these professional, these traditional singers who didn't get any support during the pandemic, which, you know, was pretty tough there. She has done an enormous amount to teach younger women to sing in the in the traditional styles of Bulgaria. She herself is from the Rhodopes, which is the southern part of Bulgaria Southern near the South border, one of the only areas of Bulgaria which during the 500 years of Ottoman Empire was actually forced to convert to Islam. And so the the singing styles and the costumes and the food, they're all a little bit different. They're absolutely beautiful music. And she sings, she sings, of course, in the style of the Rhodopes, having studied with not only learning songs from her mother and grandmother, and other family members, but studying with the Kushleva sisters, who are some of the greatest Rhodope singers of the 20th century.

John Fenn
That's a great choice Thea, so let's hear a clip from that concert.

Neli Andreeva sings

Stephen Winick
Once again, that was a song from Neli Andreeva’s Homegrown at Home 2021 concert. Thea, tell us a little more about some of the concerts that stood out for you.

Theadocia Austen
Well, of course, the music of the country of Georgia is amazing. We had two concerts and a men's group and a women's group. The singing traditions for men and women are a little bit different. Although now in the 20th and 21st century there they're becoming. They're sharing songs more between between genders and also singing together. But there's a particular song in the women's and one of the women's choices where they're singing about how hard life is in the village. And a young woman has a very difficult marriage and life is hard in the village. she she she throws herself in the river and drowns. And her husband is so distraught that he follows her and the village mourns this and that setting is is just unbelievably moving.

But there's so many! The Corsican music is incredibly moving, as well. I think the Shaker concert was very special because it presented an American composer—we don't typically work with composers but this he's he's very special. Kevin Siegfried has worked very closely with the last active Shaker community at Sabbathday Lake in Gloucester, Maine. Brother Arnold in particular, Brother Arnold is the tradition bearer who's really carrying the weight of the song tradition of the Shakers that goes back over 250 years. Their tradition is older than, you know, the United States as a country. He learned his songs from Sister Mildred. Sister Mildred was an NEA Heritage fellow in 1983, which I think was only the second year of the heritage fellowships. She learned her songs from another sister who was 90 years old at the time. And on and on it just it goes back. And so Brother Arnold does an incredible job of talking about why it's so important to pass on the the cultural knowledge, the spirituality, they're really...the shakers, the relationship that they feel to God and the world and, and they hope in the sharing of these songs, that other people will understand their spirituality and also honor the people who have come before them that every time a song is sung, the people who
Stephen Winick
That's great. So let us hear that clip from the Shaker concert in the Homegrown at Home 2021 concert series.

Sister Mildred, Brother Arnold, and Radiance Choir sing 13:18

John Fenn
So once again, we're here doing a rundown of our recent Homegrown at Home concert series, which you can watch it loc.gov/concerts/folklife. Thea, thanks so much for being with us.

Theadocia Austen
Oh, it's my pleasure. And I hope people will watch these concerts and just enjoy them as much as we do when we watch them and love these and just fall in love with these artists.

Stephen Winick
Thanks a bunch Thea.

John Fenn
We mentioned before that we were going to be talking with our Bartis interns, and we have the first of them here with us now. Please welcome Kennedi Johnson. Hi, Kennedi.

Kennedi Johnson
Hi. Happy to be here.

Stephen Winick
So before we begin to talk about the concert series, tell us a little about yourself and your internship here at AFC.
Kennedi Johnson
Yeah, sure. So I am currently, I guess a fifth year I've been here a long time fifth year graduate student or PhD student at Indiana University in ethnomusicology. I've been doing I guess this is my last week of the internship here. But so far, I've been working on the America 250 project, and doing a survey of foodways that we have in our collections working on that with Allina Migoni. And then the secondary project I've been doing is working on the Homegrown series for Heritage Months, so I was identifying concerts for Hispanic Heritage Month for this month, I guess.

John Fenn
So as an ethnomusicology PhD student and as an intern, you've kind of had this chance to observe our concert series close up and really dig into it. From this season, what was one of the concerts that most intrigued you and why?

Kennedi Johnson
Yeah. So I watched Samite’s concert. And I really enjoyed that for a few reasons. So I got, I knew him before watching this concert, because I reviewed his album resilience. I think that was in 2018 for the archives of African American music and culture. He's also a flute player. So I already love him. I play the flute. And so that was where I first heard the song “Waterfall.” And it was really nice to hear him perform it for this concert series. I'm not that familiar with the I think it's pronounced the Litungu the instrument that he was playing in that concert. However, I find it like really beautiful. I like his storytelling as well.

Stephen Winick
Yeah, Samite is just an amazing artist whom I've known for a long time, and we're really happy to have him in concert. So let's hear a clip from Samite.

Samite Mulongo
The song I'm going to play on the Litungu here is a song called “Waterfall.” It's the second song I ever wrote. And this song helped me when I was a refugee. I would go, I would just play this song, and I would close my eyes, and I would feel like I was back in Uganda. I would remember the lakes, and the rivers, and the red soil, and the people of Uganda. The warm, beautiful people.
Samite plays Litungu and sings

John Fenn
Once again, that was Samite here on the Folklife Today podcast with an excerpt from his Homegrown at Home 2021 concert video. And we've been talking with Kennedi Johnson, one of our interns who's in her last week. Kennedi we've been glad to have your input, but stick around. Okay, cuz we're gonna get back to you.

Stephen Winick
Yeah, thanks, Kennedi, and stick around for a few minutes.

But before we're joined by another guest, John and I are going to tell you about concerts that stood out for us. Of course, we're not entirely objective as we put this series together. So some of these concerts were my idea. And Samite is an example. I've been a fan of his since I co produced a concert of his approximately 30 years ago in Philadelphia. It makes me feel very old. And the crazy thing actually is that Samite doesn't look any different than he did then. And I've become this grizzled old man in the time in between. So it's very strange. But I've also been a friend and admirer of Hubby Jenkins for more than 10 years and the great old time duo Jody Stecher and Kate Brislin were high on my list. I didn't know them personally, but I've been listening to their recordings for many years. But if I had to pick one that I'm proud and happy we got into this series this year, it's probably Martin Carthy. Martin has been a member of such groups as Steeleye Span, the Watersons, Waterson Carthy, Brass Monkey, and many others. He's an English folk singer and guitarist, and he had a long running duo with Dave Swarbrick, a great fiddler, who occasionally adapted materials from the American Folklife Center archive. Martin is also a brilliant solo singer and guitarist, and years ago he was awarded an MBE for services to folk music, which is roughly equivalent to our national heritage fellowship. So he played a solo set for us. So let's hear a selection from Martin Carthy.

Martin Carthy sings and plays guitar

John Fenn
Once again, that was Martin Carthy from his 2021 Homegrown concert. And if you want to know more about the songs and artists in today's
podcast, please visit our blog at blogs.loc.gov/folklife and search for the post associated with the 2021 Homegrown podcast. It'll include fuller information about all the selections and artists.

Stephen Winick
And now I think it's time for your selection, John.

John Fenn
Well, it's not easy because there's been so many amazing ones but one's about to come up that's special to me. It's by a group called harbanger. And they're a turntable septet, so seven turntables working together. It was a group that was brought together by Harry Allen, who kind of serves as the artistic director and coordinator, although there is no leader for this group, it's important to say, I met Harry year before last, when we were--the library was launching the citizen DJ platform, which is an amazing kind of portal into library collections with a built in drum rack and and sampling mechanism that allows you to use rights free samples from library audio collections to create hip hop beats. So Harry was very interested in this. And he and I worked together to make this concert happen where they had--one of their turntables, actually two different turntables, right compositions using material from citizen DJ. So they're going to premiere this video on the 28th of September on the American Folklife Center’s Facebook page. And one of the compositions in particular that I'm really excited about is called “Pavor-Nocturnus.” And so let's hear a clip of that.

harbanger spins

John Fenn
Once again, that was harbanger from their 2021 Homegrown at Home concert video. And now it's time to talk to our other Bartis intern, Camille Acosta. Hi, Camille.

Camille Acosta
Hi. Thank you all for having me.

Stephen Winick
So why don't you tell us a little about yourself and your internship at the American Folklife Center.
Camille Acosta
Yeah, so I am 26 year old Chicana originally from El Paso, Texas. And I have been interested and fascinated with storytelling and performance on my life. I recently just graduated with my MA in folk studies from Western Kentucky University in May. And yeah, so I also just finished up my wonderful AFC internship in September as well. And while I was doing this internship, I was involved with two projects, one of which being the America Works podcast, really fun stuff, working with Nancy Groce and Jon Gold. And I was also working on a story map compilation of the Juan Rael collection that is a part of the Library of Congress and the American Folklife Center. And I was working on that with wonderful Michelle Stefano. Oh, so yeah, a lot of a lot of storytelling and a lot of creative stuff.

John Fenn
In addition to all that hard work you've been doing, you've also been enjoying the concert series, I hope.

Camille Acosta
Oh, absolutely.

John Fenn
What was one of the concerts that stood out to you, Camille, and why?

Camille Acosta
Yeah, so one of the concerts that really stood out to me was the wonderful Hubby Jenkins concert with his African American and black spiritual music and folk music. What an incredible person first and foremost, I think you can really see the light that he is that shines throughout this concert. Such amazing talent that he has, I mean, he was bringing in a banjo he was bringing in a guitar, an instrument that I had never heard of before, which were the bones which were just completely fascinating stuff. But I think what really stood out to me with his performance, and his musicality was his storytelling mechanisms. And through each spiritual through each song, he would give the audience a little insight on the historical and traditional background of slavery, right, of African American, the African American experience, all of that, all of that difficult stuff that may be really hard to talk about, but really important to talk about. And then he you know, he would play a beautiful, heart wrenching or heartwarming song attached to that.
One of my favorite songs that he played was “When the Train Comes Along,” which was gorgeous. You know, he played that on the guitar did wonderfully even his neighbor jumped in and said that he did amazing as well. A beautiful metaphor for you know, the afterlife and crossing on over on over that bridge or on over that train track. But yeah, I would say the biggest thing that stood out for me was his connections to culture and traditions and, and and making beautiful music and easy, I guess, more palatable way to to muster those difficult conversations.

John Fenn
Great. Let's hear that clip from Hubby Jenkins.

Hubby Jenkins plays

Stephen Winick
Once again, that was Hubby Jenkins here on the folklife today podcast. And I happen to know that Kennedy also was kind of a fan of hubby Jenkins. So what's What stood out to you Kennedy about his concert?

Kennedi Johnson
Oh, yeah, definitely. I've been a fan of his for a while. Fan of the Carolina Chocolate Drops in particular. But yeah, I think similar to Camille, I really appreciated his ability to discuss slavery, his storytelling. I really loved the Moses don't get lost. I think that was the first song, um, that he performed.

Stephen Winick
Yeah, that's a great one too.

Kennedi Johnson
Yeah, really great one. Also, it's just the bones that you mentioned, Camille, my great grandpa, um, played so so I'd like always just reminds me, yeah, it always reminds me of home. And he's from North Carolina, which is beautiful. But yeah, I just really enjoy the work that he does in general, of trying to discuss African American roots in Old Time Music, which is often overlooked or not considered in the national discourse.

Stephen Winick
Great. And Camille, Was there another concert that you wanted to talk about?
Camille Acosta
Yes, there are actually two that I'm very excited about this being you know, Hispanic Heritage Month. There are two Latinx Hispanic performers that I'm very excited about. One of which being Mamselle Ruiz and the other the band Cambalache. They both are fantastic musical artists Mamselle Ruiz, who was Mexican born and lives in Montreal, a French speaking area, of course, but she sings such beautiful, beautiful spiritual, traditional Mexican folk songs such as, you know, the infamous Llorona or La Bruja, and plays instruments as well. And she's just such a fantastic storyteller. And along with that, you know, the band Cambalache who are you know, son jarocho kind of musical, musicians rather. And they do such amazing work with that folk music from Mexico, specifically from Veracruz, Mexico, and they do a lot of wonderful audience interaction and getting people moving and getting people dancing and up and singing, which I just think is so beautiful, you know, kind of bringing that tradition full circle and making sure everybody is a part of the music. So yeah, those are some some of the concerts I’m very excited for, and I think it’ll be a great way to ring in Hispanic Heritage Month.

Stephen Winick
Great. We're looking forward to those two, they are on September 29, starting at noon, and you can hear them on the American Folklife Center Facebook page. And I will say that we've had members of Cambalache here before as part of the Son Jarocho masters concert and other concerts that we've had in the homegrown series, so they're not strangers to the American Folklife Center and the Homegrown concert series. So I think it is time for us to thank our wonderful interns. Thank you, Camille. Thank you, Kennedi.

John Fenn
Yeah, it's been great having you both as interns and as guests on this podcast. And as we told you before, you never really leave the AFC.

Stephen Winick
So we're going to hear a clip from Mamselle Ruiz, who is a Mexican artist who has moved and now lives in Quebec in Canada. And so she sings her songs in Mexican Spanish, but she sometimes translates part of them into Quebec French, and so we're going to hear her sing La Bruja, but you're going to hear her singing in French before you hear her singing in Spanish. So this is Mamselle Ruiz...but first, we're going to have our customary
Thanks. Thanks to all the guests and all the artists who we played on this episode of The Folklife Today podcast.

John Fenn
And thanks to Jon Gold, our audio engineer as well as all the staff at the Library of Congress who helped us deploy these episodes. And thanks to you, listener!

Mamselle Ruiz plays and sings

Announcer
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