

Library Innovation Funding: Report

Project Title: Audiovisual Documentation of the Joseph Tykociner Sound on Film Preservation Project. Phase II.

Submitted by:

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20 November 2017

Total Budget: \$8600 (Original budget \$4500, Phase II \$4100)

Amount expended: \$6917.51

Balance: \$1682.49

1. Background

In September 2016, the Executive Committee (EC) approved \$4100 for a second phase to the original project. The original Innovation Funding project proposal (submitted 23 December 2015) can be found at:

http://www.library.illinois.edu/committee/exec/innovation_fund/index.html

The Phase I report, which includes the request for additional funding for a second phase, can be found at:

<https://uofi.box.com/s/solypgd0aeyy0adtc5ttn8ji3o026562>

2. Process and Outcomes

In November 2016, we were able to commence on what became “Phase II” of the project. Phase I had included the already completed National Film Preservation Foundation (NFPF) grant funded film preservation, audio analysis, early audio decoding attempts and the first round of Library Innovation funding. Although quite successful, additional work in Phase II allowed us to continue attempts to obtain better results in terms of the decoding and restoration of the audio tracks from Tykociner’s sound-on-film experiments.

This work continued to be performed by our project partners at the Cineric Inc. in New York City. Simon Lund, Director of Technical Operations at Cineric continued to fine tune custom built software that enabled the variable density audio track to be read from a 4K scan of Tykociner’s nitrate film print. It is important to note that Cineric performed this work on a pro bono basis for the Library as a research project

dedicated to the preservation of this important artifact in the history cinema technology. While subtle differences and improvements were gained it was determined, in consultation with other experts in the field that the audio decoded from Tykociner's film was likely extremely close to that which was originally demonstrated by Tykociner himself in 1922. While the option remains to further restore the audio using modern digital audio tools, it was decided to keep utilize this version as the "preservation master" for Tykociner's experiments. The completed preservation and decoded audio of Joseph Tykociner's sound-on-film demonstrations can be viewed at the following link:

https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_ggqu09n9

Soon after this work was completed, Joshua Harris and Simon Lund were invited to present this work at a film preservation event known as "The Reel Thing," held May 28-29, 2017 at the EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Due to financial restrictions, Joshua was unable to attend and Simon presented on behalf of the project team. The event program can be found at the following link (please see Page 12):

<https://uofi.box.com/s/howmgbg4kdawpl2i840fio4rhoiwmpe3>

The project and its results were received with overwhelming enthusiasm at the Amsterdam event and led to an additional invitation to screen and present the project at a similar event at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Hollywood, California on August 25, 2017. Attendance at this event allowed for the exposure of this project to the highest level audience in motion picture and sound technology. Additionally, this allowed for project partners from the Media Commons access to world-renowned interview subjects.

Jake Metz, Media Commons Tech Specialist conducted a number of pre-arranged interviews with film historians and archivists outside of University of Illinois regarding the impact of Tykociner's work and their reaction to seeing and hearing his film and audio demonstrations for the first time. These interviews were highly successful and two of the interviewees, Jan-Christopher Horak (Director, UCLA Film and Television Archive) and Bob Heiber (retired President of Chace Audio and current Director of the Rick Chace Foundation) are considered to be the foremost experts in cinema history and cinematic audio history and technology respectively. Interviewees answered and discussed a series of topics relating to the largely unknown nature of Tykociner's work, its historical significance, and its relation to the modern concerns of film archiving and preservation. These interviews were a tremendous success and provide us with a wealth of audiovisual material that supplements the content captured during the first phase of the innovation funded portion of the project.

The area of this project that cannot be deemed a success involves the logging and editing of the original footage and the production of short trailer or promotional piece. We utilized innovation funding to hire a contractor with significant audiovisual

editorial experience to organize the footage and perform the creative work necessary. Although the project did undergo some significant delays on the management side as we attempted to work through both the continuing lab work and arranging the interviews, the editor did not make himself readily available when needed and did not adequately communicate with the project team in a timely manner. When given a final deadline to complete the work, the editor abruptly left the project unfinished, claiming to “not be the right person for the job and citing inability to “find the story.” After personally working on the Tykociner material for almost 5 years (including the NFPF grant), this was obviously a highly disappointing manner in which to end this phase of work. This work remains unfinished and unfortunately given the current work load and availability of time and resources for both myself and the Media Commons team, we cannot honestly predict or see a way of completing this work in the foreseeable future. For this reason, we are advising to end the project and are prepared to respectfully return any unused funds to the EC.

3. Next Steps

The two phases of this project resulted in over 800GB of raw video and audio material and hundreds of still images. Despite the situation described above, we are prepared to continue on-going efforts to catalog and organize the footage as we are able to find the time. The goal at this time is to organize the material in a manner in which it can be deposited into the University Archives through the Medusa Digital Repository. A future conversation with University Archives concerning options available for this work is necessary and there may be options for utilizing student labor to complete these tasks. We have managed to collect exceptional content through this project and want to guarantee that it will be available for future use and access at the right time.

4. Conclusion

This innovation funded project was extremely challenging, even more so given the fact that it was being attempted on top of an externally grant funded project (the original National Film Preservation Foundation). Despite bumps and hurdles throughout, the majority of the project can be deemed a success nonetheless. The project team was able to use audiovisual tools to document and record practices which will never be done again in this form. We were able to capture historical moments and the utilization of what is soon to be a completely obsolete medium (motion picture film and its various processes). Although we were unable to successfully finish logging and organizing the material or complete a short form piece or trailer, we have extensive footage which will be properly preserved, providing us and others the opportunity to work with it in the future. This was a very different type of project for the University Library and certainly can be described as innovative. We thank the EC for allowing us to explore and experiment in this manner and truly appreciate its continued support for the project. We look forward to revisiting the dissemination Tykociner's work in the future.