Judaica Sound Archives preserve musical heritage

BY IAN SQUIRES
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

This is the seventh in a series of stories about South Florida's Jewish heritage.

Nathan Tinanoff, director of the Judaica Sound Archives at Florida Atlantic University, has brought those archives a long way.

Seven years ago, Tinanoff volunteered to help Cantor Asher Herman organize a modest collection of Judaica sound recordings Herman pieced together. When the cantor passed away two years later, Tinanoff thought he knew the fate of the music.

"I thought that no one would care about the recordings, that they would just disappear," Tinanoff said. "There were around 1,000 at the time, and I said, 'This is a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved for our children and grandchildren,' and I went to Special Collections and said I'd take it over as a volunteer."

Five years after Tinanoff took hold of that nascent collection, developing the FAU Libraries' Judaica Sound Archives, he said they have now amassed between 40-50,000 sound recordings.

"We're getting in over 10,000 recordings a year. That's unheard of," he said. "But we're able to process, we know everything that's come in, so we're able to keep up, not only because of

Nathan Tinanoff is the director of the Judaica Sound Archives at Florida Atlantic University.
JSA staff photo/Bill **King**

the staff, but the volunteers that we have to keep up with what we get."

Indeed, as the collection has grown, so, too, has the staff that still consists mostly of volunteers.

Assistant Director Maxine Schackman began as a volunteer. Today, Tinanoff says he doesn't know what they would do without her. After Tinanoff, who is the archives' only full-time staff member, nobody else puts as much time and effort into the welfare of the project as Schackman.

"I was a senior manager at IBM, and I manage this as a technical project," Tinanoff said. "We have 13 different computers on this project, and [Schackman] brings a different aspect; she keeps me out of trouble most of the time, but she just adds a view that I don't have, and she's a very good complement to my skills."

They rely largely on their North American network of *zamlers* to locate content for the Sound Archives. *"Zamler"* is the Yiddish word for "compiler," and means a person who gathers scattered things in order to constitute a collection.

"We have a corps of *zamlers* across the United States and Canada, about 60 of these individuals," Schackman said. "And they work in their individual communities to find these recordings and ship them to us."

Sound Archivist Ben Roth walked into the Zvee Aroni Music Room to share a recording he was in the process of digitiz-

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ing. The room is named for Cantor Zvee Aroni, whose music is already in the archive. The cantor also happens to be Roth's father.

"The title of this song is 'You Can't Be Smart Enough Against Your Wife,' sung by Aaron Lebedeff," Roth said with a grin.

Roth is another member of the team who started as an occasional volunteer, but he is now a regular staff member. He felt the same impulse as Tinanoff, Schackman and the rest of the volunteers, workers and collection of *zamlers.* They wanted to rescue as many recordings as possible before it became too late.

"As folks passed away and their children inherited their collections, it wasn't of value to them like it was to their parents, and they didn't know what to do with them," Tinanoff said.

So the records met the fate Tinanoff always feared.

"No one wanted the records and they would just throw them away," he said.

Instead, the FAU Libraries' Judaica Sound Archives is giving them life, for succeeding generations.

"We're trying to make it accessible to people, and also, the children are most important to us, and that's why the first music we put on our Web site was children's music, and we're working on putting up additional children's music," Tinanoff said. "We feel that this is a cultural heritage that must be preserved. And that's the bottom line."

To learn more about the FAU Libraries' Judaica Sound Archives call (561) 297-2207 or visit www.fau.edu/jsa.