

Smithsonian Folkways World Music Pedagogy Lessons

During my summer graduate coursework, I took a Smithsonian Folkways World Music Pedagogy course that was inspiring, challenging, and a huge learning experience. We began the week together learning about the mission of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings:

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the **nonprofit record label** of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. We are dedicated to **supporting cultural diversity and increased understanding among peoples** through the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound. We believe that musical and cultural diversity contributes to the vitality and quality of life throughout the world. Through the dissemination of **audio recordings and educational materials** we seek to strengthen people's engagement with their own **cultural heritage** and to enhance their awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage of others. Smithsonian Folkways is part of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Our mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to **document "people's music," spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world**. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways commitment to cultural diversity, education, increased understanding, and lively engagement with the world of sound.¹

Throughout the week, we worked with musicians who shared cultural background, musical traditions, and dance from Guinea, Congo, Java, Ghana, Tahiti, the Balkan peninsula, Brazil, Somalia, and Tanzania. We also learned about religious syncretism in Latin American choral music and the maqams and improvisational techniques used in Arabic music. The final day of class consisted of brief presentations on music culture curricular units, annotated research lists, or university lectures that were created by those taking this course; it was stunning to see what everyone was studying, each from different teaching and cultural backgrounds and how they plan to integrate more opportunities for students to experience "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors".²

I would highly recommend this course to anyone who is looking for guidance on responsibly integrating world music in their classroom. Without having participated in the course, you can also access wonderful lesson plans for free on the Smithsonian Folkways website³, all of which extensive research and links to musical recordings, many of which are available in full on Youtube. If you end up utilizing recordings from Smithsonian Folkways, my professor encouraged us to download the CD liner notes, which provide a fuller picture of the music and culture it comes from.

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¹ Smithsonian Folkways, Mission & Vision, <https://folkways.si.edu/mission-and-history>

² Published in Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's 1990 essay on the importance of using children's literature to provide students opportunities to see themselves, see into another person's experience, or immerse oneself fully through reading.

³ Smithsonian Folkways lesson plans: <https://folkways.si.edu/learn>

