

Meet Derek Piotr August 26, 2025



We were lucky to catch up with Derek Piotr recently and have shared our conversation below.

Derek, thank you so much for joining us. You are such a positive person and it's something we really admire and so we wanted to start by asking you where you think your optimism comes from?

I think I've always had a natural bent towards being optimistic – there is a lot of pain in the world, but there is also so so much beauty – the sunlight on a maple branch, the curtains in a restaurant, the way a stranger looks at you on the street. I also think I just have a personal inner conviction that drives me and I can't actually connect that to any image or experience out in the world – it is part of my nature. That is its own fuel for optimism.



Great, so let's take a few minutes and cover your story. What should folks know about you and what you do?

In 2020, I pivoted away from my career as a solo musician to begin focusing on recording other voices. I had been an audio engineer and solo artist for ten years at that point, but found myself preoccupied with folksingers, or really roots singers that were documented in the 1930s for the Library of Congress. Getting in touch with some of these performers' next of kin made it very obvious to me that old folk songs and ballads were still remembered in the twenty-first century, so I began recording songs and interviews in North Carolina in 2020. A year later, I had the opportunity to live in the UK for a summer, and I continued to record old songs, some sung by musicians, but most of them sung by everyday people. By the following year, this project had gathered enough momentum that I decided to found fieldwork-archive.com in August of 2022 – my assistant and I created the webpage for The Derek Piotr Fieldwork Archive with 209 songs listed. Now we are on the brink of 1,500! I continue to proliferate the Archive with lectures and workshops, and am fiscally sponsored this year to build the site infrastructure as well as do area-specific city focus recording – recording immigrant experiences from one city in particular to highlight a region's diversity. But I also spend time collecting by traveling to Iceland (48 recordings in a week), making phonecalls to one-horse towns in Idaho, and documenting songs from some of the librarians who are hosting my lecture at their library. Folklife and folksong is everywhere – and the Archive is trying to preserve as much of it as possible.

Looking back, what do you think were the three qualities, skills, or areas of knowledge that were most impactful in your journey? What advice do you have for folks who are early in their journey in terms of how they can best develop or improve on these?

I have been working in music for almost twenty years, and I grew up in the iTunes generation – ripping and tagging CDs into our music library and sorting them by tags, adding artwork...this was almost archiving in a way, before streaming came along, so I think this was pre-training me to begin my work as a sound archivist. I've also been editing audio on a computer for just as long, which is very helpful when it comes time to condense oral history interviews from files that are occasionally over two hours long. The third skill? Attention to detail.



What would you advise – going all in on your strengths or investing on areas where you aren't as strong to be more well-rounded?

This is a very good question. Early in my career, as I suspect many people do, I went as far as possible to make my music the central point of my life, to the point of extreme sacrifice sometimes. While I regret nothing, as I age, I see my disciplines more like a knitting basket – something you pick up in the evening for a few hours, and then go on to tend to other areas of your life. Music is a funny dog – I think it is strengthened and not weakened by one spending time living their lives in other and all areas – this in turn feeds the vitality of the music. It is hopeless to make music about music – if all you do is spend time listening to albums, “hustling” on social media with fellow musicians, and reflecting a mirror on a mirror, the music itself would come out empty. In this way, I've definitely chilled on how many hours per day are spent purely on craft, and the rest of my life weaves in and out...the craft is then more of a natural emission of a life lived rather than some sort of frenzied trophy thing. I think I was not always able to see this point of view when I was just getting started with my career.

Contact Info:

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- **Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/@derekpiotr>
- **Soundcloud:** <https://soundcloud.com/derek-piotr>
- **Other:** If anyone has a song they remember their family singing – I want to hear about it!
Write me: derek@fieldwork-archive.com