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Collecting the Echoes: Derek Piotr Comes to Utah

What do you sing without realizing it? The Fieldwork Archive wants to know.

By McKinsleigh Smith

There's a certain kind of song that doesn't belong to stages or streaming platforms. It lives in kitchens, in half-remembered lullabies, in the rhythm of dishwater and screen doors, in the off-key hum of a grandfather who swears he's "not a singer." They're the ones that matter most when you really need them.

Sadly, these songs rarely get recorded. They fade away quietly with the people who carry them, and only the echoes of the original remain with those they loved most.

For the past six years, Derek Piotr has made it his work to catch those songs before they disappear.

Traveling across the US and beyond, Piotr has been building something both fragile and immense: a living archive of memory. Fragments – verses remembered from childhood, campfire chants, church hymns, playground taunts, and the odd, unplaceable melodies that seem to belong only to one family, one town, one moment.

That growing collection now lives as the Fieldwork Archive, an evolving repository of what Piotr calls “the old songs” – the ones that slip through the cracks of formal history.

This March, he’s bringing that work to Utah.

From March 17 to 24, Piotr will be based in Logan, inviting locals to sit down, remember, and record whatever songs they carry – no matter how incomplete, strange, or small.

If you think you don’t have anything worth sharing, you’re exactly who he’s hoping to meet. The Fieldwork Archive isn’t about musical virtuosity. It’s about access to memory, culture, and the strange and intimate ways people pass things down without even realizing it. Piotr says he actively seeks out those who hesitate, who preface their contribution with “I’m not really a singer, but…”

In many ways, that hesitation is the archive’s true starting point.

Utah, with its deep intergenerational ties, strong community traditions, and rich overlap of religious, rural, and folk cultures, offers especially fertile ground. Beyond songs, Piotr is also looking for prayers, recipes, poems, work chants, protest verses, and local lore – especially stories that brush up against the supernatural: ghosts, monsters, or the unexplained.

Anything remembered is worth recording.

So if there's a melody tucked somewhere in your past, like something your mom sang absentmindedly, something you learned at a summer camp, something silly, sacred, or completely nonsensical, it might belong here.

If you're interested, contact derek@fieldwork-archive.com. You can hear an example of a captured folk song below. Check out "Omie Wise," performed by Shirley Glenn and Charlie Glenn on June 6, 2022 in Beech Creek, Banner Elk, North Carolina.