

Making Sense of the Archives: A Digital Exhibit on the Hemispheric Work of Delia, Manuel, and George

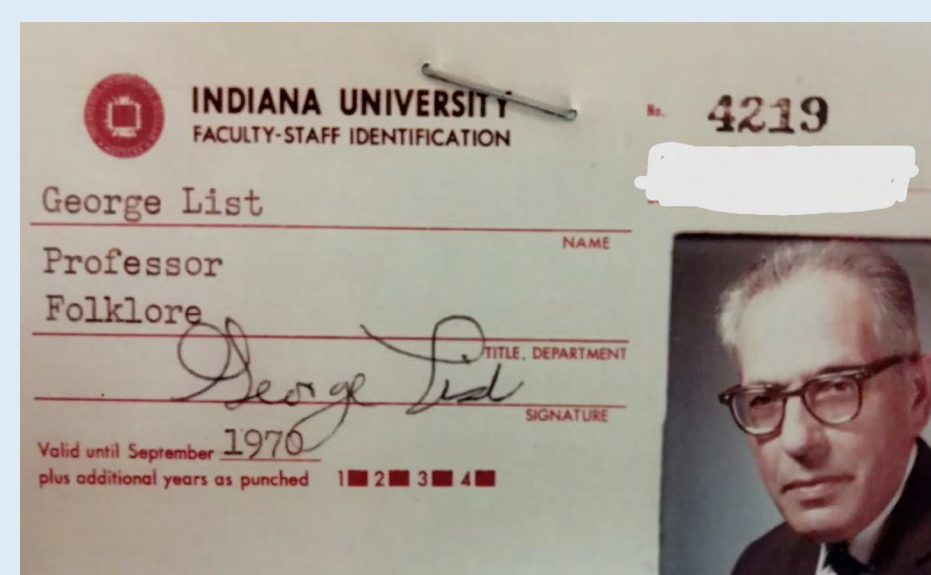
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Introduction

The Zapatas & List Project is intended to be a set of digital exhibits that highlight the hemispheric dialogues around music research, focusing on the case of U.S. ethnomusicologist George List and Afro-Colombian siblings - artists, activists, and scholars - Delia and Manuel Zapata Olivella. With my research I aim to unbury, understand, and amplify the voices of these Afro-Colombian scholars who collaborated with List in multiple projects.

A digital exhibit is a highly mediated form of publication that showcases primary sources found in archives and creates a narrative. These mediations in a digital format allows me to engage deeply with the archival materials to a point that I start developing a close reading, listening, and sensing of the collections. That engagement allows me to understand the reverberations, resonances, and echoes of intellectual thinking from the hemisphere (and the globe), that are foundational to the establishment of the field of ethnomusicology.

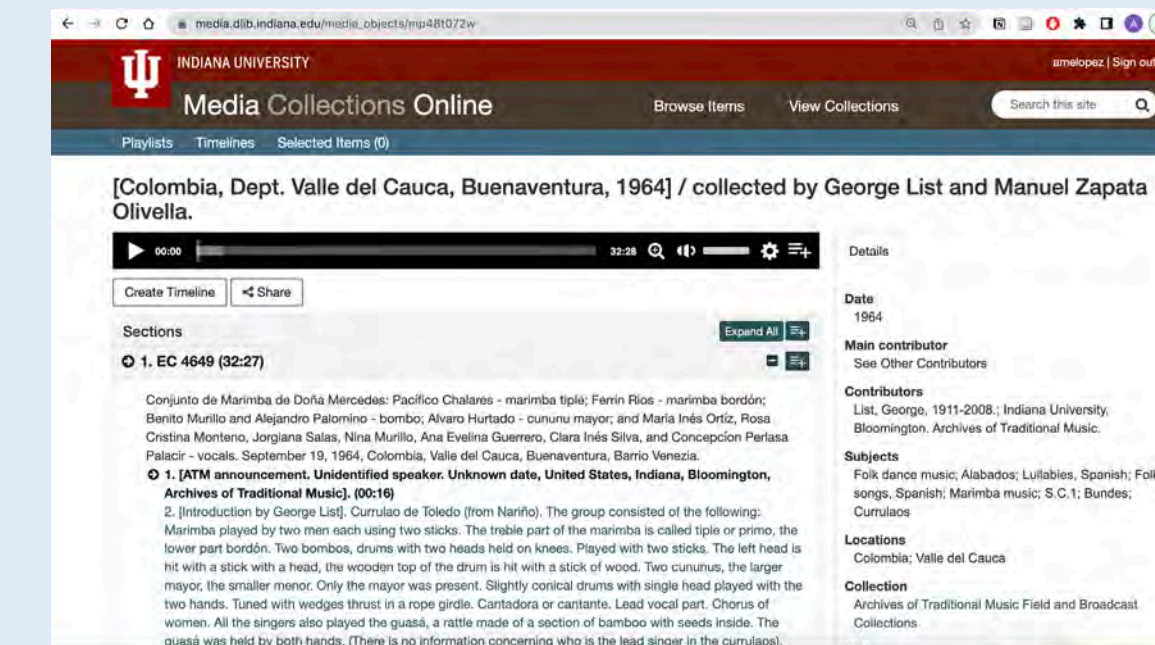
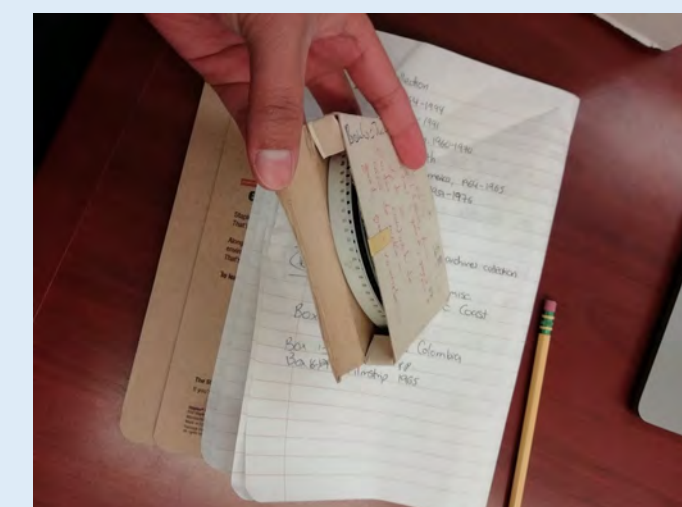
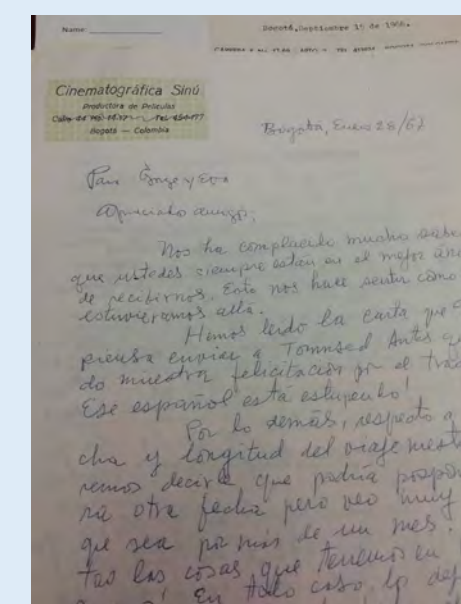
Indiana University houses two collections from George List: one resides at the Indiana University Archives and the other at the Archives of Traditional Music. In them, multiple field notes, sound recordings, photographs, video recordings, and correspondence reside. The memories, histories, and voices contained in these repositories can shed light on how the ideas and work of Delia and Manuel Zapata Olivella were key in the construction of List's scholarship on Colombian music. What follows is a representation of my process for unburying, understanding (or making sense), and amplifying the voices of these two Afro-Colombian scholars through a digital exhibit. I aim to reflect on the "behind the scenes" of the construction of the first prototype of a digital exhibit that showcases materials living in the physical archives.



The George List collection was splitted in two parts, and is living in two different institutions at Indiana University. One part resides at the **Indiana University Archives**, in it there are materials like administrative documentation pertaining to his trajectory at IU as faculty, correspondence, manuscripts, personal documentation, some audio recordings and one audiovisual recording. The other part of List's materials lives at the **Archives of Traditional Music** - institution that List directed between 1954 and 1976, in that collection, field recordings are the main content, complemented by fieldnotes, publications, photographs and some limited correspondence. The memories, histories, and voices contained in these collections can shed light on how the ideas and work of Delia and Manuel Zapata Olivella were key in the construction of List's scholarship on Colombian music.

In my research process, unburying these collections meant to piece them back together. Relational thinking then, was key for making sense of the information, histories, and sensibilities living in those archives.

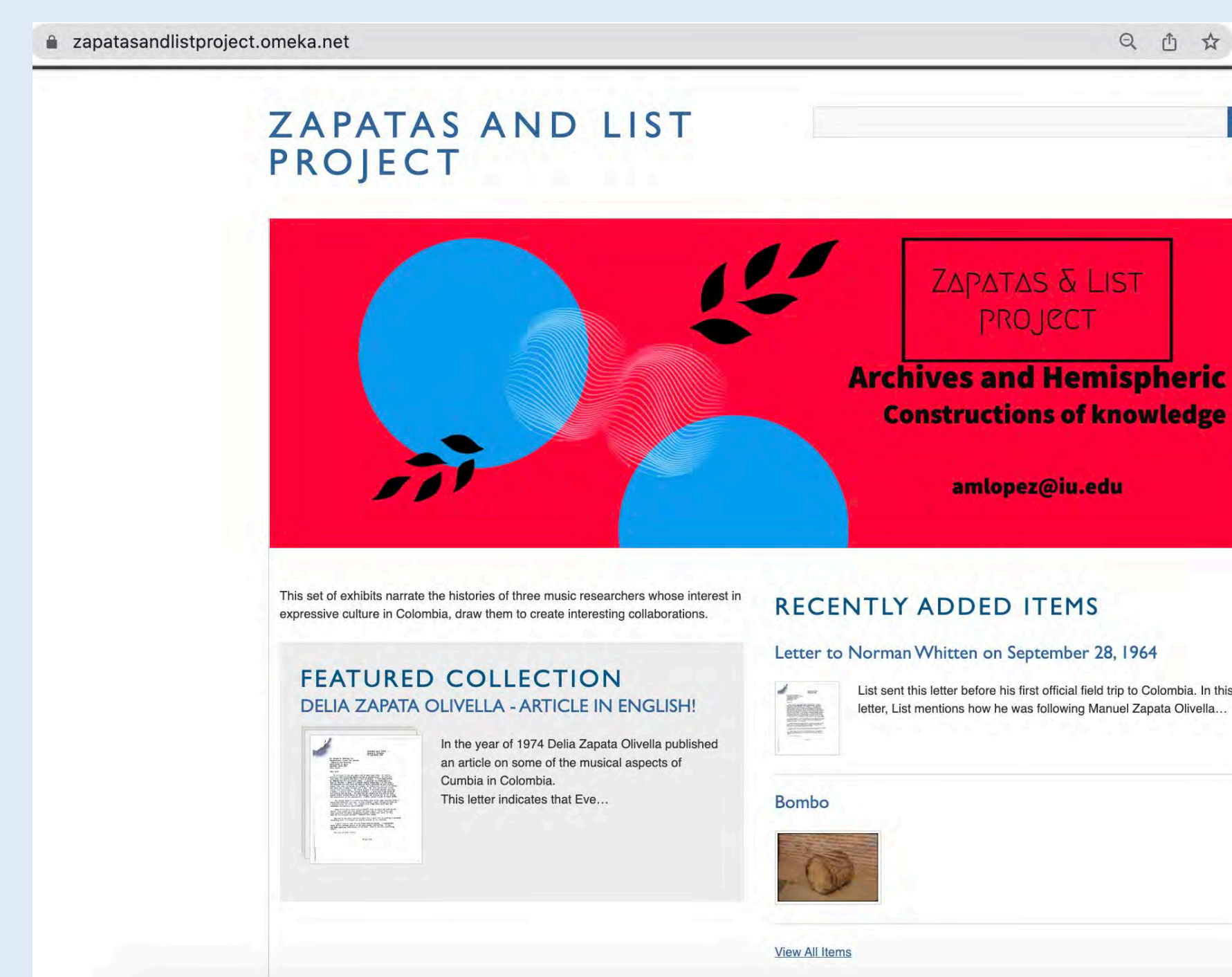
Hybrid Archive



In my process of digging the archives (unburying the bodies of knowledge stored there), I have encountered a rich variety of materials in multiple formats. From handwritten documents, to audiovisual recordings that only survived in the digital format. The ephemerality of some of the technology becomes tangible and the sense of border-crossing is constant.

List's archive is hybrid in multiple forms: language, format, institutions, countries, and technologies of transmission. This rich corpus of materials reflects the scope of the work of these three scholars. On the one hand, List was an avid advocate for public/engaged scholarship, besides academic publication he engaged in multiple public-facing programs: he produced educational TV series, created an archiving system for sound archives, and was actively involved in political projects like the Pan American Union, or anti-war actions. On the other hand, Delia and Manuel Zapata Olivella siblings were deeply engaged in activists circles and combined academic and creative work, creating a *campesino* theater company, an Afro-Colombian dance company, a series of radio programs, educational TV series, creative writing, academic publications, folklore expeditions, and political actions denouncing structural racism in Colombia. By the time List was writing the book "Music and Poetry in a Colombian Village: a Tricultural Heritage," his sight diminished drastically. By the time of his retirement List was completely blind. Thus, the archive contains also documents that require other sensory aspects like touch, since braille is a notation system that needs to be touched, and that cannot be moved to the digital archive. Sound then, became a central aspect of my research.

This hybrid archive led me to perform a multi-layered process in which analog materials needed to be digitized, and adjusted to the format accepted by the platform Omeka.net. Unburying then also meant to give archival materials a new life in the digital space. Sound, and voice are prominent themes in my research and in the archive itself.



Reflections

POSSIBILITIES

- Collaboration is key: Librarians and archivists were key for making sense of these materials, their openness to collaboration make this project something possible, and foster a sense of community much craved in academic environments.
- Piecing together this exhibit requires imagination, time, flexibility, and being comfortable with chaos. The materials need to be re-visited multiple times, in multiple formats, from analog to digital and all the transformations possible in the digital space (PDF, JPG, reduced size images, compressed files, etc.)
- As a highly relational practice, digital exhibits can foster potential spaces for connection. In my project I am relating pieces of the collection found in two Archives at Indiana University, nevertheless, I will extend these connections to other institutions, groups, places, and people.
- Online exhibits can be edited at any time, which means that one exhibit can have multiple lives, like archival materials.

LIMITATIONS

- Although the digital format of exhibits allows accessibility and amplification of voices; it is limited in terms of sensorial capabilities. Sound, text, and image are the main elements, but the affective relationality is lost as it is the access to other technologies like braille.
- Collaboration can be a possibility as it can be a limitation. Oftentimes uneven power relations make of inter-institutional collaborations something difficult.
- Although the digital space makes materials "discoverable", "searchable", and visible to a larger audience, it requires a level of digital literacy to comprehend the layout and navigation possibilities of the platform. Besides this, access to platforms like Omeka are not affordable or possible to independent researchers, and artists from the margins.

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