



Preserving 90 Years of Music with the Curtis Institute

Curtis Institute of Music to make more than 90 years of musical artistry available on-demand using Preservica's active digital preservation software.

Background

The halls of the Curtis Institute of Music are certainly alive with the sound of gifted young performers, but these days Curtis is putting digital preservation top of the agenda to ensure that their art will be available on-demand and preserved indefinitely.

Preservica's Cloud hosted digital preservation and access software has been chosen by Curtis's digital repository team to provide streaming and long-term preservation of student recordings and digitized versions of hundreds of shelves of CDs, cassette tapes, and DVDs, some of which are now starting to decay. In addition, Curtis will preserve reels of films and videotape which are quickly becoming obsolete as the equipment to play them becomes rare. Without the right digital preservation technology, these recordings are at risk of being lost forever.

Opened in October 1924, the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia is one of the world's most celebrated music academies. Founded by Mary Louise Curtis Bok, the heiress of the Curtis Publishing Company estate, the Curtis Institute of Music educates and trains exceptionally gifted young musicians to engage a local

and global community through the highest level of artistry.

Each year, 175 students come to Curtis, where they are nurtured by a celebrated faculty and inspired by the school's distinctive 'learn by doing' approach. Curtis is one of the most selective institutions of higher learning in the US, with only a 4.8% acceptance rate. The Institute provides full-tuition scholarships to all of its students, ensuring that admissions are based solely on artistic promise. Curtis offers more than 100 concerts each year in Philadelphia, as well as on-tour performances around the world.

The Curtis Institute of Music has recordings dating back to 1924, including original broadcasts from the National Broadcasting Company, as well as the recordings of its current and former students, many of whom have gone on to become successful contemporary performance musicians and composers, such as Leonard Bernstein, Jennifer Higdon and George Walker. The Institute also holds copies of its founder's correspondence, including a letter from Helen Keller, and a special collection of sheet music. In addition, Curtis is digitally preserving the institutional records related to running the school.

Challenges: 175 students, 100 recitals per year, each recital recorded 4GB per file

While the Curtis Institute of Music had already taken steps towards migrating its huge collection of recordings from tape cassettes to CDs, the accelerated rate of format change proved difficult to keep up with, and Curtis began to look towards a better long-term storage solution.

Curtis' collection of audio and visual files is vast, and rapidly expanding. There are about 100 concerts in the student recital series alone, plus orchestra concerts, operas, masterclasses, and tour performances each year. Each student recital needs to be recorded and cataloged for future reference. Audio files can range from 100-300MB and video files from 1-8GB.

CD copies of recordings from as recently as 2002 are starting to decay, and some files are beginning to become corrupted. What's more, the Library is physically running out of room to store all of the CD copies; "We have a couple of thousand CDs and DVDs just of student recitals" says Molly O'Brien, Media and Metadata Librarian at the Curtis Institute of Music. "Sometimes CDs and DVDs can go missing, but with a digital copy, that can't happen. Many of our students are actually quite wary of using CD copies because these days they expect to be dealing with files streamed over the Internet. The quality of sound on a CD is not as good as the master .wav file."

Moving to the Cloud

The Curtis Institute of Music opted for the Cloud Edition of Preservica, as Digital Archivist, Barbara Benedett, explains; "We're a small institution with shared IT amongst other organizations - we made the financial decision not to purchase a server. Through Preservica, we're able to use Amazon Web Services which is ideal for us because it enables streaming. Most of the other platforms don't do that, or they aren't set up to deal with as much audio and video as we have."

Our audio department does all of the recordings for the recitals and performances. We're hoping to take a lot of work off their hands by eliminating the student requests that are going to them.

Once we can start ingesting recitals, students can browse the access portal we have set up with Preservica and find what they need."

Although some of the archive's records will be public information, Curtis needed a long-term storage solution that would provide different levels of access. For example, student recitals will not be available to the public as they are subject to copyright issues, and are primarily used as a learning tool for students and faculty. In addition, the Institute will also be ingesting institutional records, which can be accessed by certain people within the Institute's administration. Using Preservica Cloud Edition the administrator can control who can see and use specific content, so they are only accessible by the intended audiences.

The Future is Bright as the Institute Looks Forward to Increased Productivity

Preservica's digital preservation and access technology will enable Curtis' Library and Archives to become much more productive, as Molly explains; "The Recording Services Department is always busy – there are lots of recitals and performances throughout the year that they record and edit. The post-production process takes hours, then we need them to burn the recording to a CD or DVD, and then send it in the campus mail to the Library. All too often students stop by to collect a recording that isn't ready yet. By uploading AV files directly to Preservica, we will save a huge amount of time because we can eliminate those last two steps of the process."

"If staff are putting together a collection, they can just login to Preservica online to access it. In addition, Preservica works together with our ArchivesSpace catalogue software to create a user friendly, seamless archives management tool. This makes everything much easier to find, so staff and students can search and explore the collection themselves. "

"Moving away from CDs towards streaming will have a huge benefit for Curtis", says Barbara. "With Preservica, we'll be able to offer students and staff a much more efficient system where they can access files quickly, easily, and securely."