

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

>> This is Jennifer Gavin with the Library of Congress. Today we're pleased to be speaking with performer Michael Feinstein, who is a renowned of the works of George and Ira Gershwin and a member of the Library's National Recording Preservation Board, which designates sound recordings of significance for preservation as part of the Library's National Recording Registry. Mr. Feinstein, thank you so much for joining us today.

>> Thank you, Jennifer.

>> You are an author and also an award winning entertainer. You've been dubbed the Ambassador of the Great American Songbook; however, you also make time to serve as a member of the National Recording Preservation Board of the Library of Congress. Why is sound preservation so important to you?

>> Sound preservation is not only the history of our culture and our country but also a document of life in the world. There is something with sound that is so extraordinary that it can be preserved, that we can listen to a recording made in 1925 and be transported back to that time. Many people say that they prefer radio over television because radio was a place of the imagination and when we listen to a sound recording, it transports us in a way that is different from a visual image and the legacy of recorded sound is much more vast than the legacy of film because there are millions and millions of recordings of all different types. There are field recordings of Aborigines and of mountain songs and every kind of ethno musicological research and then there are environmental recordings and there are news recordings and home recordings and soundtrack recordings and commercial recordings. It is such a vast group of work and it is so desperately in need of preservation because it all could disappear.

>> There was recently released a Library of Congress National Recording Preservation plan, could you speak a little about what you see as the impact of that plan and what it may do to help with the preservation of these endangered sound recordings?

>> Yes, the purpose of the plan was to create a model and a means to preserve all of this material because there are collections all over that are shepherded by very talented and well-meaning people who sometimes don't have the knowledge or the skill or the understanding of how to best preserve what they have, either if it's in an institution or a private collection because we're just learning about what is happening to recordings about how long they'll last, about the shelf life and then this study comes along, an extraordinary study because it teaches us how to save it, how to preserve it. It's a massive undertaking but this is a major, major step. It's the first step towards permanence.

>> You worked as Ira Gershwin's cataloger and archivist for six years, your book, *The Gershwins and Me, a Personal History in Twelve Songs*, provides us with a rare glimpse into the Gershwin brothers and their music. Please speak a bit about the Gershwin's legacy.

>> Like many people when I was a young kid, I think I was 8 or 9, I discovered the music of George Gershwin and then I discovered Ira's lyrics and the music of George Gershwin and the songs of the Gershwins is so special to me in a very personal way, as it is for many people and so the Gershwins for me are a soundtrack of my life, if you will. They have created a body of work that continues to be fresh and inspired in spite of its age, which I guess is the hallmark of any great art that it lasts or transcends the time in which it was created. And so the Gershwins for me are a reflection of not only a certain time in our American culture but of the greatest possible inspiration.

>> Could you talk about some of your most memorable moments with Ira Gershwin, of course you knew him personally.

>> I was very lucky to meet Ira. I worked with him for six years from 1977 until his death in the summer of 1983. I met him when I was 20 and that was a life changing experience because I never dreamt that I would meet Mr. Gershwin and he taught me so much about music and about lyrics, about his craft and about life and one of my favorite moments is when we had gotten to a point where I was so comfortable in his household that one day, he told me something and I knew that it was wrong. I knew that his memory was faulty and I had the temerity to question him and he said no, I remember it was 1930, I said no, it was 1931 and then I found some piece ephemera or a book or something to show that he had the date wrong and he said well, you have an advantage over me. And I said what is that; he said I've only lived my life but you've thoroughly studied it.

>> [Laughter], you know, it makes a person wonder, as close as you are to the Gershwins and as close as you are to their music, do you have a favorite Gershwin song and if so, why.

>> Certainly the most requested song in performance is Love is Here to Stay and that is a favorite for me. The other favorite is Isn't it a Pity, which is a song from a failed show called Pardon My English and Isn't it a Pity is a song that has become better known. I think that as time progresses, more and more of the songs that are great become a part of the fabric of culture and Isn't it a Pity is a song that when I recorded with Rosemary Clooney in 1985 was not well known at all but since then, Streisand has recorded it and said that it's her favorite song and some of the others have picked it up and I love this song because it so reminds lyrically of Ira.

>> You're participating in a tribute to Danny Kaye and his wife Sylvia Fine here at the Library. Their collection now resides here at the Library of Congress, as does the Gershwin collections. What is it about these extraordinary talents, Kaye and Fine, that made them such a dynamic duo and beloved icons in entertainment?

>> It's very appropriate that the Kaye collection is here because Danny Kaye defines a certain era of show business that is completely lost, except that it survives by its preservation here at the Library of Congress. Danny and his wife Sylvia kept almost everything related to their careers, which is fantastic because that doesn't always happen and

the arc of Danny Kaye's career touches every aspect of show business and his wife, Sylvia's work, is equally important because she was the woman behind the man. She wrote much of the material that he performed and was his sounding board and together, they created a certain kind of synergy that would not have existed had they not met. Danny Kaye still would have been a very famous man because he was extraordinarily talented but together, their achievements are spectacular so this collection reflects their collaboration and the scope of it is -- it's mind boggling, just the amount of photographs and then the music where you can now go online and you can see all these pictures but you can see the orchestral arrangements. You can see all of the songs, all of the rehearsal material, it's all there and so it's a legacy not only for entertainment but also for scholars and for education to learn something about our time that can't quite be gathered in any other way.

>> Thank you very much. We've been talking today with renowned performer Michael Feinstein, who supports more extensive preservation of the nation's recorded sound heritage and is an expert in the works of George and Ira Gershwin, work that is part of the collections at the Library of Congress. Thank you.

>> Thank you, it was a pleasure.

>> This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at [loc.gov](http://loc.gov).