Collection prides itself on record keeping

AP — Now this is a record collection:

Jerry Lee Lewis' original Sun Records singles. The Rolling Stones' first album, autographed by Mick, Keith, Charlie, Bill and Brian. A Beatles licorice disc signed by Paul McCartney.

But Bob George, curator of this musical menagerie, speaks with obvious pride about another LP, "Calypso Is Like So . . ." by Robert Mitchum. On this record, Mitchum does something he does not do in "War and Remembrance": he performs "Mama, Looka Boo Boo" with a psuedo-Caribbean lilt.

"Can you believe this? We just got it in the mail the other day," said George, who (with a little help from his friends) is trying to locate every record made since 1950 for the burgeoning ARChive of Contemporary Music.

"We forbid ourselves to refuse records. The stuff the PMRC (Parents Music Resource Center) would try to get out of libraries? Bring it in!" said George, who estimates the collection — begun in late 1985 — now numbers almost 250,000 sound recordings.

That attitude explains why the Butthole Surfers (a punk group) sit beside Count Basie, and how the Beatles' classic "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" shares space with Telly "Kojak" Savalas' creepy "You've Lost That Loving Feeling."

The eclectic ARChive is the brainchild of George and David Wheeler, who initially hoped to create a collection of rock 'n' roll but soon expanded their vision to include any and all types of popular music.

George, producer of the breakthrough Laurie Anderson record "O Superman," brought his music-business ties and a 25,000-record collection; Wheeler's contributions were 10,000 records and a master's degree in library science.

The idea (and the albums) soon found a home: above the Blarney Castle bar in downtown Manhattan, up two rickety flights of stairs, in a cramped loft now filled with records from acid rock to zydeco 47,000 in all.

The rest of the collection is somewhat far-flung, as George — a 37-year-old Youngstown, Ohio, native — explains in the excited voice he affects when discussing the collection.

'It might be arrogant, but we think we really have usurped the function of the Library of Congress in terms of keeping track of this material.'

— Thomas Cvikota

"We have one location in Chicago, one location in my parents' basement. There's about 30,000 in Boston, 100,000 in upstate New York, and depending on whether these two (a pair of ARChive employees) give us their records, two other locations," he said.

They also have a lot of support: every major record company currently ships the ARChive free copies of their new releases, and the nonprofit organization's Board of Advisers includes musicians Nile Rodgers, Paul Simon, Lou Reed and Todd Rundgren.

"They have a real vision of where they want to go," Reed said shortly after the project first started. "They're in it for the long haul."

The singer of "Walk on the Wild Side" proved prophetic: George now talks about a day five years down the road when the ARChive will be part-library, part-museum, open to the public and available for researchers.

"It's like archaeology. You're digging," said *Thomas Cvikota, who is* handling ARChive fund raising.

"You're going down into the tomb, into the ruins, and finding the essence of the culture."

While 250,000 sound recordings sounds like an incredible collection, the ARChive falls well short of the Library of Congress' 1.7 million records dating back to 1888. But George feels that his system will soon make his assembly the final word in contemporary record research.

"It might be arrogant, but we think we really have usurped the function of the Library of Congress in terms of keeping track of this material," he said. "We certainly have a better hands-on approach."

That approach allowed the group to help director Martin Scorcese find the right music for "The Last Temptation of Christ"; George was able to hook him up with a Moroccan vocalist who did the wailing at Lazarus' tomb in the film.

Scorcese has since joined the Board of Advisers, a testament to the ARChive's digging ability and its growing fame.

The search is already under way to find expanded quarters in Manhattan; once that's accomplished, George and company plan to close down and take eight months to a year just cataloging records and preparing for the grand reopening.

Once all that's finished, there remains at least one more problem.

"We read once that once a year you have to give every record a quarter-turn, because plastic precipitates down," said George, breaking into a loud laugh. "I can imagine someone saying it now: 'OK, today your job at the ARChive is . . ."

Israeli musicians to perform Tuesday

The American-Israel Cultural Foundation in cooperation with the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit will present four young artists from Israel in concert at 8 p.m. Tuesday.

The artists, who are here following their Carnegie Hall debut, are: Hagai Shaham, violin; Efrat Schecter, flute; Zvi Plesser, cello; and Rina Dokshinsky, piano. They will perform works by Bach, Handel-Halvorsen, Faure, Haydn, Bartok, Kreisler and Gliere.

These performers have participated in international music festivals, appeared as soloists with major orchestras and have been in recitals throughout the world.

The America-Israel Cultural Foundation was organized to nourish and develop the cultural life of Israel more than a quarter of a century ago. Among those who have received scholarships are Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zuckerman, Daniel Barenboim and Miriam Fried.

The public is invited to attend the free concert at the West Bloomfield Center, Drake and Maple, West Bloomfield.

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