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Songs in the Key of L.A.: New Project from the Library Foundation of Los Angeles Celebrates the City’s Rich Musical History, Told Through the Collections of the Los Angeles Public Library

New Book, Recordings, Documentaries, Exhibition, and Public Programs Bring to Life the World’s Only Collection of Southern California Sheet Music

LOS ANGELES (MAY 28, 2013) – This summer, the Library Foundation of Los Angeles celebrates the rich musical history of the City of Angels with “Songs in the Key of L.A.,” an exciting new project bringing to life the sheet music collection of the Los Angeles Public Library.

The first in a series of collaborations between the Library Foundation and the Los Angeles Public Library to mine the Library’s vast collections, the project unveils for the first time the world’s only collection of Southern California sheet music. Through a comprehensive anthology, new recordings, a special exhibition, a free concert with Grand Performances, and more, the Library Foundation and Library will bring the collection to light for contemporary reflection.

“The Los Angeles Public Library is the place for Angelenos to explore, reimagine, and celebrate their history,” said City Librarian John F. Szabo. “We are pleased to bring this incredible collection to light, as it demonstrates this important fact: Public libraries are every-person institutions, where everyone, from scholars to middle schoolers, can unearth treasures that can teach, inspire, and even change their lives.”

“This unprecedented collection would be lost to us if not for the intrepid public librarians who recognized its importance in the building and defining of Los Angeles,” said Library Foundation Ken Brecher. “It is our pleasure to work with the Library to unveil these songs – some for the first time in 100 years – to the people they belong to, the people of Los Angeles.”
For over a year, USC Professor Josh Kun, director of The Popular Music Project at USC Annenberg’s Norman Lear Center, and a group of his students, working with librarians from the Central Library, combed the Library’s roughly 50,000-piece sheet music collection, identifying and shaping an unprecedented archive of Southern California sheet music – the very first of its kind.

Dating from sheet music’s heyday (roughly 1850 through the 1950s), the collection covers the period of L.A.’s growth from remote outpost into sprawling metropolis and provides a rare window into early Southern California music history. Spanning genres from pop to jazz, Mexican folk to blues, all of the songs in the collection – many of which have never been recorded – are either about L.A. and Southern California, feature key regional songwriters and personalities, or were published by one of the many independent music publishers who were an integral part of Los Angeles industry at the turn of the 20th century.

Kicking off the project, on June 1, Angel City Press will publish Songs in the Key of Los Angeles: Sheet Music from the Collection of the Los Angeles Public Library. Written by Kun and with special contributions from musical legends Van Dyke Parks, Stew, and a host of California historians, the anthology showcases more than one hundred vintage sheet music covers from the collection, from California lullabies and Los Angeles waltzes, sunshine rags and sunset serenades, to emerging West Coast jazz and the legacy of Mexican folk traditions. Available at bookstores throughout Southern California, the book will also be carried at The Library Store. For more information, please visit www.angelcitypress.com/skla.html.

That same week, through the Library’s website, the Foundation will release five new recordings of music from the collection by beloved local artists Aloe Blacc, I See Hawks in L.A., Julia Holter, Petrojvic Blasting Company, and La Santa Cecilia. The recording sessions will be showcased online every two weeks in five short documentaries produced by KCET’s transmedia award-winning arts and culture series, Artbound. The first session with I See Hawks will also be featured during the Artbound television series on May 30 at 9 p.m.

On July 1, the exhibition, Songs in the Key of L.A., will open on the first floor of the historic Central Library in Downtown Los Angeles. Featuring a rotating selection of pieces from the collection, the exhibition will use sheet music to explore the early history of Los Angeles’ music industry, civic music culture, and the role of music in shaping key stories central to the making of the city.

On July 13, the Foundation will host Kun, Los Angeles musical icon Van Dyke Parks, and surprise guests for a special evening of song and story specifically for Library Foundation Members. And on July 18, the Foundation’s award-winning ALOUD at the Central Library series gets in on the fun, hosting Kun and musical guest Quetzal for a rare evening of L.A. music history.
On July 25, Grand Performances hosts City Librarian John Szabo and Library Foundation President Ken Brecher for “Off the Shelf: Creating L.A.’s 21st Century Library,” a lively discussion about the future of the Los Angeles Public Library, starting with the “Songs in the Key of L.A.” project.

And finally, on August 2, Grand Performances, in collaboration with the Library Foundation, presents “Songs in the Key of L.A.” the concert. With selections hand-picked by Kun, hometown heroes Ozomatli and special guests will bring songs from the collection to life in a free concert for the people of Los Angeles.

For more information about this and other special collections, visit www.lapl.org.

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About the Library Foundation of Los Angeles
The Library Foundation of Los Angeles provides critical support to the Los Angeles Public Library resulting in free programs, resources and services available to the millions of adults, children and youth of Los Angeles. Through fundraising, advocacy and innovative programs, the Library Foundation strengthens the Los Angeles Public Library and promotes greater awareness of its valuable resources. For more information, please visit www.lfla.org.

About the Los Angeles Public Library
The Los Angeles Public Library serves the largest population of any library in the country through its Central Library, 72 branch libraries, over six million books and other items, state-of-the-art technology, and its Web site (www.lapl.org). These resources and its more than 18,000 public programs provide everyone with free and easy access to information and the opportunity for life-long learning. For more information, visit www.lapl.org.

About the Curator
Josh Kun is a professor in the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California, where he directs the Popular Music Project of the Norman Lear Center. He is the author or editor of several books, including *Audiotopia: Music, Race and America*, and his writings on music and culture have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *American Prospect*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, and many other publications. As a curator and consultant, he has worked with the Getty Foundation, the GRAMMY Museum, the Santa Monica Museum of Art, the Autry Museum, the Skirball Cultural Center, and others.