

PennSound:

All the Free Poetry You Care to Download

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Philadelphia - The recording industry may not want anyone downloading music without paying for it, but a new project at the University of Pennsylvania encourages downloading right to MP3 players and hard drives all the poetry a listener might want. And it's all free for the asking.

PennSound (<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound>), launched January 1, 2005, is a Web-based archive for noncommercial distribution of the largest collection of poetry sound files on the Internet. **PennSound** offers a large variety of digital recordings of poems -- currently 1,500 and fast growing -- mostly as song-length singles.

"This has never been done before," said Al Filreis, PennSound co-director, English professor and director of Penn's Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing. *"Most of the electronic sound files available to the public are of entire poetry recordings, 30 or more minutes long, with no tracking of individual cuts or poems. By right-clicking a PennSound link, a user can save a single poem and listen to it as a high-quality MP3 file. We believe philosophically that, since there is no significant profit to be gained by the sale of recorded poetry -- unlike music -- many, many more poets will continue to grant us permission to use their work."* As part of the **PennSound project**, the Annenberg Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Penn is developing a sophisticated cataloguing tool for the poetry sound files, enabling other libraries to collect the material and enabling teachers to add the MP3s to their online syllabi. The poetry sound files are retrievable both from a library catalog by authors' names and via Web search engines. **PennSound** combines aspects of a library archive and a Web music-download site. Basic bibliographic information is incorporated in each file so that a user downloads not only the sound but also key facts about the recording, including author, title, place and date of the recording, series, as well as copyright information.

"PennSound is as much about preservation as distribution," said Charles Bernstein, English professor who, with Filreis, co-founded and co-directs the project. *"Most poetry sound recordings are at risk of deteriorating if not converted or copied. The beauty of PennSound is that in the course of preserving these recordings, we are also making available a treasure trove of wonderful poetry performances that we believe will attract a whole new generation to poetry as a performance art."*

PennSound is an ongoing project for producing and archiving new audio recordings from Penn and around the world, as well as preserving existing audio archives. The site provides as much documentation about individual recordings as possible with new files and new bibliographic information to be added.

*Funding for the project comes from private donors to Penn's Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, which sponsors the project. In addition, **PennSound** works closely with the **Electronic Poetry Center** <http://epc.buffalo.edu> and **UbuWeb** <http://ubu.com> as well as **Penn's English Department** <http://www.english.upenn.edu> and **School of Arts and Sciences Computing** <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/computing>*

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