

Spotlight on Music Collections

Welcome to a new column in CAML Review! Spotlight on Music Collections aims to profile interesting or unique music collections in Canada through the voices of those who work with them. If you have a suggestion for a collection or individual that should be featured, please reach out to carolyn.doi@usask.ca.

What is your name and role at the Edmonton Public Library?

My name is Raquel Mann, and I am the Digital Public Spaces Librarian at the Edmonton Public Library (EPL). My role is to develop digital services and interactive spaces where community can explore, create and access local content. Along with “Capital City Records: Edmonton Local Music”, which I speak about here, other projects in this portfolio include: “Voices of Amiskwaciy”, a space for sharing and celebrating local Indigenous content, “Edmonton Stories: A Canada 150 Digital Storytelling Project” and “Open Data at EPL”. [Editor’s note: see list of Web links at the end of the article]

What is Capital City Records?

Capital City Records is EPL’s first digital public space created to celebrate Edmonton’s diverse local music scene and history. This platform features a growing collection of over 296 albums submitted by 233 different local music groups and selected by a jury of respected members of the local music scene. The music is available for free for anyone to stream, but you need a library card to download tracks. Each year, we hold an open submissions round where local artists are invited to submit their albums to be considered for the collection. We also have a partnership with the Edmonton Music Awards, where all winners are guaranteed a spot in the collection. All artists whose albums are selected are provided an honorarium and receive royalties for streaming and downloading.

This project is community-led at its foundation. Capital City Records received input from Edmonton’s music community during a [2014 unconference](#) we held with YEG BandCamp, including the decision to put music curation in the hands of the community through our jury and to tell stories about music history (described on the Library As Incubator Project site). Since its launch in 2015, there have been over 65,000 streams and almost 10,000 downloads of tracks.

The open source MUSICat platform itself was developed by *Rabble*, a group of talented and committed developers who love libraries and are finding ways to support local music in an ethical and accessible way. EPL was the earliest major project to collaborate with Rabble, and since then, the platform has been used by a growing network of libraries from Nashville to Seattle.

Capital City Records also hosts a growing local gig poster archive featuring posters that date back to the 70’s and a videos page featuring the *Dead Venues* documentary on old live music venues.

However, this project goes beyond the digital realm. Capital City Records has not only fulfilled our goals of creating a rich, local collection of music for customers to discover, but it has also helped support and contribute to community-building on the ground through concerts, music programming and connecting partners to musicians. EPL has hosted over eight concert events showcasing 39 different groups that saw over 800 attendees. These events include EPL hosted performances along with performances through collaborations with Up + Downtown, Kaleido and Dickens Festivals in Edmonton.

Finally, in 2018, we embarked on an exciting fundraiser where we produced a limited-edition compilation of Capital City Records music on vinyl, a first for public libraries. *Riversides: A Capital City Record* was made possible through the support of the Edmonton Arts Council, who funded the album artwork and musician honorariums. Every element of this project was local, from the pressing to the artwork. Funds raised from Capital City Record events and vinyl sales helped support the development of our recording studios in the new Stanley A. Milner Library's Makerspace.

We are currently working on a project to purchase as many physical copies of albums in the collection as possible to feature in a special collection at the downtown library.

How have you been making connections between the collection and your users, especially when so many people are working from home?

Aside from the events, concerts and projects I already mentioned, we do a lot of outreach in the form of connecting with music community groups, organizations and businesses to learn about their work, share ours and seek opportunities to support each other. For example, we worked with CKUA for two years to create the "Song of the Week" podcast where local "celebrities" such as Edmonton Folk Festival Producer Terry Wickham and music reporter Sandra Sperounes talk about their favourite tracks in the collection.

It has been a difficult time for everyone, and quality online content seems more important and needed than ever. Over the last few months, EPL staff have been creating a beautiful set of playlists to give listeners a taste of the best across genres in our collection. Kris Burwash, owner of Edmonton's *Listen Records*, volunteered to scour the collection and share a playlist of his favourites too. We have been reaching out to artists to find information on virtual concerts, performances or projects they are working on so we can share on our blog.

Over the next few months, we are looking at ways to host virtual performances, events or programs that feature Capital City Records artists.

In 2021, we are hoping to launch a new addition to the collection. For the last few years, we have been working with the *Legends of Edmonton Music Scene Society* to create a showcase on our site that will feature bios, media, archived radio interviews with those who have shaped our music scene over the decades.

Can you share one of your biggest challenges of working with this collection?

The biggest challenge of working with this collection is that there is no shortage of amazing ideas, both staff and community-led. There is so much more we would like to do, including featuring artists in on-going programming, within and outside of EPL walls. Open rounds are a lot of work. We accept up to a hundred albums a year, so that means we are communicating and supporting that many artists in ensuring their albums are set up properly on the space, supporting jury members, ensuring the new collection represents diverse genres and groups. That said, I absolutely love this part (it really doesn't feel like work).

Can you share one of your favourite things about working with the collection?

My absolute favourite part of working with the collection is building relationships with artists and the music community, and by doing so, I've discovered so much amazing music. I am constantly in awe of their talent and hard work. Edmonton has an incredibly supportive music community, and artists are always excited at new opportunities to work together.

I moved to Edmonton eight years ago from Vancouver Island, where I was heavily involved in the music community. It is always a bit difficult coming to a new city and finding your niche. Prior to even coming into this position, Capital City Records was a huge resource for me to get to know the city, discover local music and meet new people. If I saw a poster for a live show, I would always check to see if they were in the collection to have a listen before attending.

Anything else you'd like to add?

I just have to say, it has been incredible to see how Capital City Records has developed over the years and the Rabble/MUSICat platform. I am so appreciative of this inter-library initiative. At heart, it's really all about providing a safe and ethical space to boost local arts.

Web Links (in order of appearance above)

Capital City Records: Edmonton Local Music: <https://capitalcityrecords.ca/>

Voices of Amiskwaciy: <https://voicesofamiskwaciy.ca/>

Edmonton Stories: A Canada 150 Digital Storytelling Project: <https://www.epl.ca/digital-storytelling/>

Open Data at Edmonton Public Library: <https://www.epl.ca/open-data/>

2014 unconference on Library As Incubator Project site:

<http://www.libraryasincubatorproject.org/?p=15914>

MUSICat platform: <https://musicat.co/rabble>

Capital City Records Local Gig Poster Archive: <https://capitalcityrecords.ca/posters>

Dead Venues documentary: <https://www.gigcity.ca/2015/05/06/dead-venues-doc-honours-edmontons-fallen-clubs/>

Edmonton Public Library concert events: <https://www.epl.ca/capital-city-records/#events>

“Song of the Week” podcast: <https://www.epl.ca/capital-city-records/#vinyl>

Capital City Records playlists: <https://capitalcityrecords.ca/featured>

Edmonton Public Library blog: <https://www.epl.ca/author/katherine-gibson/>