



ARSC Statement on 2008 Universal Music Group Vault Fire

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The Board of Directors of the Association of Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC), its members and community members, express their distress over the destruction of an enormous number of historic and significantly important sound recordings in the Universal Music Group's archives fire of June 2008. It has now been four months since news stories first reported the full extent of these losses.

UMG chairman and CEO Lucian Grainge reportedly made a commitment to his company's employees: *"We owe our artists transparency. We owe them answers... Part of "owning this" is redoubling our efforts to be a leader in preserving the rich cultural legacy upon which our industry is based."*

ARSC agrees with Grainge that artists *are* owed answers and we think the public is entitled to answers as well. Anything less than the fullest public accounting of these losses is a denial of "the rich cultural legacy" to which UMG says it has now committed itself. The fire, and the clear lack of corporate accountability which followed it, left both the public and scores of the affected artists in the dark. We are encouraged by reports that UMG has employed a "worldwide team" to create a full inventory of these losses. But when will such an inventory be made public?

Major commercial entities who control the majority of the master recordings made over the past century have an obligation to act as cultural stewards of the material they hold. It is incumbent on all assets holders to maintain a policy of transparency in discussing aspects of conservation and preservation, and to employ best practices in archival management. If an assets holder no longer envisions further commercial exploitation, it should understand its responsibility to preserve this significant musical heritage. If it lacks the means or willingness to do so, then it should seek outside assistance.

Non-profit archives can provide expertise in cataloging, metadata, preservation, database management and storage even while recordings still have commercial potential. ARSC has been working to help preserve our nation's history in sound for more than a half-century. We bring together private individuals and institutional professionals, archivists, librarians, and curators representing many of the world's leading audiovisual repositories. ARSC draws on the professional experience of researchers, historians, discographers, musicians, engineers, producers, reviewers and broadcasters. We take the work of preservation seriously and we believe it is time that the commercial recording industry do so as well.