

P O E T R Y



F O U N D A T I O N

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100 Essential American Poets Historic Audio Archive

Donald Hall, former US Poet Laureate, and UK Poet Laureate Andrew Motion present rare audio recordings by leading American poets

CHICAGO — The Poetry Foundation, in partnership with the UK-based Poetry Archive, announces the launch of the Essential American Poets historic audio collection of seminal American poetry. When completed, the project will make freely available the recordings of more than 100 American poets reading their own work, selected by former US Poet Laureate Donald Hall in consultation with UK Poet Laureate Andrew Motion.

Part of the Poetry Across the Atlantic initiative to reacquaint UK audiences with modern American poetry, the Essential American Poets audio project aims and gives poetry lovers a unique opportunity to discover and listen to some of the most celebrated American poets for free.

The Poetry Archive and the Poetry Foundation have worked closely with the British Library and the Library of Congress to curate this historic compilation of audio poetry. Many of the recordings appear in a digital format for the first time. This new selection of free recordings from classic American poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks and Theodore Roethke is elsewhere unmatched. Previously unavailable or difficult to obtain, these recordings are now fully digitalized and easily accessible online through www.poetryfoundation.org and www.poetryarchive.org.

“There is nothing like hearing the poet’s voice. The entryway to poetry is the beauty of its sound. Sound persuades us of its authenticity and prepares us to receive the subtlety and power of its emotion,” commented Donald Hall. “This online archive of poetry recordings opens the wholeness of poetry to the world’s ear.”

The initial stage of the project allows listeners a rare opportunity to hear recently appointed US Poet Laureate Kay Ryan reading poems such as “Paired Things” and “Flamingo Watching.” Other American voices to be added include former US Poet Laureates Gwendolyn Brooks, Ted Kooser, and Robert Pinsky, and Pulitzer Prize winners Yusef Komunyakaa, Philip Levine, and Theodore Roethke. In addition, the launch includes important recordings by poets Hayden Carruth, Galway Kinnell, Heather McHugh, Rodney Jones, and Jean Valentine.

Among the 47 recordings added today are definitive works such as Yusef Komunyakaa’s “Facing It,” Galway Kinnell’s “Saint Francis and the Sow,” Theodore Roethke’s “My Papa’s

Waltz,” and poems by former US Poets Laureate Ted Kooser and Gwendolyn Brooks—“A Room in the Past” and “The Lovers of the Poor,” respectively. Additionally, rare recordings by poets including William Carlos Williams, Donald Hall, Louise Bogan, Yvor Winters, Elizabeth Bishop, and James Tate, are slated to come online within the next few months.

In addition to making the recordings available on its website, the Poetry Foundation is also issuing a new podcast of the readings. The inaugural episode of the “Essential American Poets” podcast, now available at www.poetryfoundation.org, includes rare recordings of Gwendolyn Brooks reading her poems “of De Witt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery,” “The Lovers of the Poor,” “the mother,” and “A Sunset of the City.”

Emily Warn, editor of poetryfoundation.org, noted: “Andrew Motion was one of the first to recognize that the Internet is allowing millions of people to experience poetry in its oldest form—as an oral art form. Adding recordings of great American poets to poetryarchive.org makes it an even more comprehensive resource for people interested in listening to poetry.”

Patricia Gray, head of the Library of Congress Poetry and Literature Center, said the Poetry Across the Atlantic initiative “unites in virtual space some of the most memorable poetic voices—both historic and contemporary—of both countries.” She noted that the 71-year old poetry program at the Library of Congress is one of the oldest in the United States and is the home of the US Poet Laureate.

Andrew Motion, UK Poet Laureate and co-founder and co-director of the Poetry Archive, said: “Adding these American voices to the Poetry Archive has been a real revelation to us, given the rarity of some of the recordings in the UK, which means we were hearing many of these famous names for the first time. And what a wonderful variety of accents and rhythms is implied by that single word ‘American’—one day you might be listening to Ted Kooser’s wise, deep tones transporting the listener to the stillness of a Nebraskan winter evening, the next to the restrained anguish of Yusef Komunyakaa commemorating the sufferings of the Vietnam war. Throughout the experience of listening to and writing about these voices, we feel we’ve been mapping America in a new and intimate way.”

For more information or to listen to the collection, please visit www.poetryfoundation.org.

About the Library of Congress

The Library of Congress is the oldest federal cultural institution in the United States. It is also the largest library in the world, with millions of books, recordings, photographs, maps, and manuscripts in its collections.

About the Poetry Archive

The Poetry Archive exists to help make poetry accessible, relevant, and enjoyable to a wide audience. It came into being as a result of a meeting, in a recording studio, between Andrew Motion, soon after he became UK Poet Laureate in 1999, and the recording producer, Richard Carrington. They agreed about how enjoyable and illuminating it is to hear poets reading their work and about how regrettable it was that, even in the recent past, many important poets had not been properly recorded. For more information, please visit www.poetryarchive.org.

About the Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of Poetry magazine and one of the largest literary organizations in the world, exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs. For more information, please visit www.poetryfoundation.org.