

‘Soundscapes of the People’ to document local musical history

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Where words fail, music speaks.

Hans Christian Andersen's quote is particularly true in Pueblo where "Soundscapes of the People" will document musical histories of the city's underrepresented communities. With Pueblo's rich Latino/Chicano culture, complemented by Slovenian, Italian, African American and Asian influences, the city "speaks for the country," said Susan Thomas, an ethnographer who is leading the program.

"The Chicano/Latino history is hugely important because it is a large demographic of the city so we will be spending a considerable amount of time making sure those stories are heard but the project is bigger than that," said Thomas, a University of Colorado Boulder musicology professor and director of the university's American Research Center.

"We are interested in lots of different traditions because that is what makes

Pueblo so unique – these communities that have been coexisting and making music together for a really long time."

The Soundscapes of the People project will explore ways that musical traditions have shaped social, ethnic and religious identities.

Thomas and two of her graduate students will conduct and record oral interviews.

'Memory keepers' to share music culture of Pueblo

Thomas said that because many "memory keepers" have grown older, there was a sense of urgency in hearing the stories about Pueblo's musical history and culture.

She said it was of the utmost importance to document this for future generations.

"There's been very little research on the music culture of the city," she said.

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The Klamm Shell restaurant wall at 424 W. Northern Ave. features a mural of a compilation of musicians and was created by artist Anthony Armijo.

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Music

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"It has been eight decades since there's been any kind of academic study on Pueblo's music. That was in 1944."

Part of what makes Pueblo appealing for the study is that "the city has been reinventing itself and coping with a lot of challenges. It becomes pretty clear that music has been a big part of that reinvention through music festivals and other things," Thomas said.

The program is made possible by \$74,000 worth of grants that will help Thomas and her students collaborate with Colorado State University Pueblo to document musical culture.

"We are thrilled about this collaboration with CSU (Pueblo). We are working on a formal agreement so we can jointly house the archive of oral history and interviews," Thomas said.

"That would be fantastic because this is community knowledge and it needs to stay with the community. We are excited the data won't just be used to write some academic papers, but be really usable by the community."

Part of the mission at CSU Pueblo's new Aztlán Center is to promote research and teachings related to the various peoples of the Southwest, said Rhonda Gonzales, dean of library services.

"The Aztlán Center staff are very excited to collaborate with CU Boulder on this project," Gonzales said. "Through this project, we hope to advance knowledge about our unique community and region."

"This project will help tell the story of Pueblo's diverse communities and our vibrant musical culture."

CSU Pueblo also is working on an aligned grant which will allow Pueblo students to take part in the archival

process. The archive is a digital one with a very detailed index that will make topics "super accessible and very user friendly," Thomas explained.

Small seed grants will enable Pueblo's kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers to create educational materials to help their students learn more about music history.

A family connection drew Thomas to Pueblo

Thomas' interest in Pueblo was born when she moved to Colorado in 2018 and discovered her family had a brief history in Pueblo during the early immigrant waves of the early 20th century.

"Pueblo is such an unusual city with its long-standing cultural diversity and the different musical traditions associated with those different groups. It seemed like a rich resource to investigate," she said.

Thomas has co-directed a similar project in Athens, Georgia for the University of Georgia.

"It is always great to talk to people and learn about where you live. I am especially excited about hearing stories and looking at the way music plays a role in Pueblo's history," she said.

Thomas and her students are setting up interviews, doing site analysis, compiling lists and scheduling interviews with Pueblo's music leaders, which will start later this month. They will be following up with subjects those key figures suggest for additional interviews.

To offer information or ask questions about the project, email pueblo.soundscapes@colorado.edu.

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