Following the cataloguing in 2014 by volunteer Ruben Kiredjian of many of the several hundred Armenian, Turkish, and other related 78 rpm records, dating from across the first half of the twentieth century, in summer 2015 Prof. Leon Janikian began the project of digitizing these interesting and historically important recordings.

Janikian, a former NAASR Board Member and longtime Professor of Music at Northeastern University in Boston, is also a veteran recording engineer and musician. He is the creator of the Archive of Armenian Music in America (armenianmusicarch.com), designed to store and restore for posterity the aural history and traditions of the Armenian community in the United States. The partnership with NAASR and the inclusion of its recordings will be a significant step in this process, and it is hoped to make many of these recordings accessible.

Says Janikian: “The Armenian Diaspora in the United States has had a long tradition of producing audio recordings for sale in the US and Canada. Many of these were produced in the US on this project which has long been on my agenda. Currently the source recordings are held in my office at Northeastern and at the Mardigian Library at NAASR. The method of delivery will be via an internet site, free of charge.”

The records in the NAASR collection have been donated by a number of members and friends through the years and represent a cross-section of the kinds of music that Armenian-Americans enjoyed from the early twentieth century onwards. Folk songs, dance music, patriotic songs, novelty tunes, instrumentals—as well as, of course, many Turkish-language songs, often performed by Armenians. While it is recognized that for some in the Armenian community such records are a source of unease or even anger, they are a part of the Armenian-American experience that needs to be recognized and understood within the cultural context that produced them.

Although Janikian’s main focus is on recordings made in America, the NAASR collection also includes records created in Turkey, Egypt, Greece, and Soviet Armenia. Although some of the recordings were released by major record labels such as Columbia, Victor, or Decca, a great number were issued by small, independent Armenian-owned companies such as Sohag/Sohkag, Parsekian, Margosian, Pharos, and Oriental/Armen Vahe, to name a few.

It is important that these fascinating pieces of our culture be preserved and documented. We hope that if you have such historic recordings, or ephemera related to them such as catalogues, that you will consider donating them to NAASR.