

Proposing a new release on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is widely known and loved for the catalog it has built up, expanded, and maintained over 70 years under its mission of keeping the history of music and sound from the United States and beyond available in perpetuity for music lovers, scholars, and communities. The label also continues in this mission by adding new releases to its holdings every year.

We aim to publish a small number of high-quality unsolicited releases that can meaningfully add to our catalog. We receive around 50–60 proposals of this nature every year, many of them featuring quality music and important musicians. In the challenging climate of the current music industry, very few of these proposals are accepted for production. Folkways believes that musical and cultural diversity contribute to the vitality and quality of life throughout the world. We aim to represent this mission in the projects we accept for production.

In order to create an equitable and transparent process, we invite proposals to be submitted in the format outlined in this document so our curatorial team can assess them, seek external expertise where needed, make informed decisions, and respond as quickly as possible. We will not review proposals that do not follow the instructions below.

To minimize great efforts spent on proposals that do not meet our criteria, we advise you to send a brief email to FolkwaysProposals@si.edu that **answers questions No. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 9** (acknowledgement of timeline, proposed title, two-paragraph summary, permissions status, and sound samples) for initial feedback before submitting a full proposal. We meet on a quarterly basis. Please allow 3 to 4 months (after all materials have been received) for full proposal reviews.

Thank you for your interest in submitting a proposal to Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and for promoting music of, by, and for the people.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings – New Project/Recording Proposal

- 1. Are you ok waiting 2–3 years for this project to be released?** Our release schedule is very full. Thus, if you would like your album to come out before sooner than 3 years from now, you might consider submitting elsewhere.

- 2. Proposed project/release title**

- 3. Summary**

In one or two paragraphs, describe the core of your proposal, including its rationale, approach, and interest/appeal for listeners. (This release is ... It does ... It distinguishes itself from other recordings by...). Please also comment if the proposed release/acquisition is of strategic importance for its community of origin, the sustainability of a tradition, and/or a broader social context.

- 4. Permissions and Clearances**

Do you have written permission from the performers to use sound recordings, video, and photographs on a commercial CD, on the Internet, and in future formats? Indicate if it is original music or if compositions need to be cleared with publishers.

- 5. Features**

What do you consider to be the outstanding, distinctive, or unique features of the release? Why should Smithsonian Folkways release this recording?

- 6. Outline**

Please provide a detailed outline of the release in no more than four pages, including the overall narrative, complete track list, and indicate any sound/tracks being submitted for review. This gives us an idea of how the material fits together and how the release will be developed as a whole. Also include biographies of the artist(s), producer(s), and others involved.

- 7. Positioning**

- a.** Consider the existing releases in this field and explain specifically their strengths and weaknesses. Spell out how your release will be both similar to and different from other releases on Folkways and other labels.
- b.** Consider what aspects of the music material or its approach are similar to or different from other existing or forthcoming related releases. What music/information has been left out of those releases and what is included in yours?
- c.** Please describe specific similar releases in a separate paragraph, including titles and years of publication. This information will provide the reviewers and the Folkways production and marketing teams with a frame of reference for evaluating your material.

8. Promotion

What do you consider to be the major market for the release? (General audience, children, education, students, young adults, adults 25-50; adults 50 and above?)

What would be the best avenues to market this release: on the web, traditional advertising, via festivals or other special events? Please be specific.

9. Sound

If available, select one or two tracks that are an integral part of the album and send these as a [SoundCloud](#) link. They should be those you consider the best representation of the range of the album. If you do not have definitive sound yet, you may send related recordings that help reviewers understand the value and viability of the project. Indicate if it is original music or if compositions need to be cleared with publishers.

10. Words

How are you envisaging the written material for the release: introductory essay, liner notes, cover text? Have they been written or do you have authors in mind for written content? Have they been contracted and signed releases?

11. Visuals

Are there images suitable for the cover, photos, and other illustrations? Have they been selected? Have the rights been cleared? If not, what steps must be undertaken to do so?

12. Status

Do you have a timetable for completing the various parts of the release?

- a. What portion or percentage of the material is now complete?
- b. When do you expect to have a complete recording?
- c. When do you expect to have the other production parts complete?
- d. What is the budget? How much have you secured/do you need to secure?

13. Contact details

Name:

Organization (if applicable):

Email:

Phone:

Address:

City and postal code:

Country:

Please allow at least 3 to 4 months for the proposal evaluation and review process. We will contact you as soon as we have had a chance to thoroughly examine your proposal. Thank you for your interest in Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. We look forward to reading and hearing your materials.