

New Letters

MAGAZINE * ON THE AIR * OFFICE OF THE EDITOR

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New Letters on the Air Awarded “Save America’s Treasures” Grant

KANSAS CITY, MO. – After 32 years of recording and broadcasting America’s literary giants, *New Letters on the Air*, the nationally syndicated public radio show, is now designated as an American Treasure. The National Endowment for the Arts and the National Park Service recently awarded the program a “Save America’s Treasures” grant, matched by funds from private donors, listeners, writers, the Public Radio Exchange and the University of Missouri-Kansas City, to preserve and digitize the vast collection of recorded voices of poetry, fiction, essay and drama.

The *New Letters on the Air* archives contain over 1,000 recordings and feature key writers in American literary history during the last half of the 20th century, as well as those shaping the 21st. The collection includes the only recording of Grace Paley reading her widely-anthologized short story “The Loudest Voice” as well as a rare recording of John Gardner reading from *Grendel*. Other voices to be preserved include a long list of now-deceased writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Howard Nemerov, Gwendolyn Brooks, and James Dickey.

New Letters on the Air began in 1977 at the University of Missouri-Kansas City as an extension of *New Letters* literary magazine. In the beginning, the program featured national and regional poets reciting their work. Later, it grew to include the interview-and-reading format that exists today, and expanded its focus to include all genres of imaginative writing. Nearly all of the episodes from the first 25 years of the program exist on reel-to-reel tape, and the “Save America’s Treasures” grant will provide for digital transfer and preservation of these materials. New programs are produced weekly in this ongoing series, and can be heard on public radio stations across the country, and also on the popular *New Letters on the Air* podcast.

Originally founded as the centerpiece of the White House National Millennium Commemoration in 1998, “Save America’s Treasures” is a public-private partnership that includes the White House, the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Dedicated to America’s priceless historic legacy, the program recognizes and rescues enduring symbols of American tradition that define this nation. Administration of the *New Letters on the Air* grant draws on the cross-disciplinary partnership between the National Park Service and the National Endowment for the Arts.

“Save America’s Treasures” requires a 1:1 match from recipients, and *New Letters on the Air* met that with support from the Public Radio Exchange, the University of Missouri-Kansas City’s Communication Studies Department, the College of Arts and Sciences, and *New Letters* magazine. Support also came from writers who have appeared on the program, such as Garrison Keillor and Lisa See, and also from private donors, such as Kansas City businessman Pete Browne, who wrote, “I hope we can encourage more folks to embrace the arts during these tough times – it’s a bold way to celebrate the importance of community and to send a very positive and hopeful message about the future.”

Once the work is completed, the *New Letters on the Air* archives will be available to radio stations through the Public Radio Exchange at www.prx.org, and also at the *New Letters* Web site. Find out more about *New Letters on the Air* at www.newletters.org/radio.