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Espe Alegria: Cultural Advisor and Voice of the Basques in American Radio

Erin Passehl

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Espe Alegria: Cultural Advisor and Voice of the Basques in American Radio
The Basque Program

- Began ca. 1952 with the financial support of *Euskaldunak, Inc.*
- Radio as communication medium
- Unique in that Basque language and music restricted under Franco’s rule, but could be aired in the United States
- One of a handful of radio shows in the United States spoken in Basque (Buffalo, Wyo.)
The Basque Program: Volunteer Hosts

Julian Lachiondo (ca. 1952-1953)

Cecu Jayo (ca. 1954)


Inaki Eiguren (1982-1986?)

Erin Passehl, “Espe Alegria,” 2010 Euskal Herria Mugaz Gaindi
“[The Basque Program] brought an hour of enjoyment to those who were making the transition to the American way of life.”

– Teddy Khteian-Keeton
The Basque Program Format

Radio Show Format

Music
  - Basque and Spanish songs (traditional, popular, etc.)
  - Listener requests

Social
  - Birthdays, anniversaries, deaths

Information
  - News, events
  - Sports scores
  - Weather reports
“Sheepherding was boring and miserable, with only Espe Alegria’s Sunday radio program to entertain [us] in the desolate wilderness; [we] went to the top of a mountain each time to listen.”

– Jesus Sillonis, sheepherder and camp tender
Espe’s Translation and Immigration Services

“I am always busy. I never know what I’m going to be doing from one day to the next...[I’ll] get a call from the federal court to be an interpreter for a new arrival, or to help an alien resident with his or her citizenship papers...Or [I] will be asked to translate a will from Basque or Spanish to English.”

– Espe

Espe and Henry visited with sheepherders in their camps to assist with their immigration paperwork or bring them supplies

Erin Passehl, “Espe Alegria,” 2010 Euskal Herria Mugaz Gaindi
“Espe was instrumental in our efforts to mount a first-class national art show of the Basque community.”
– Teddy Khetian-Keeton

Tribute to the Basque (1956)

Sand portrait of Victoria Urresti by Boise artist Luther Douglas

Amuma’s Story by Boise artist Fairy Frank (Teddy Keeton)

Erin Passehl, “Espe Alegria,” 2010 Euskal Herria Mugaz Gaindi
Espe’s Basque Music Collection

- Owned hundreds of albums of traditional and unique Basque music used on radio show
- Donated them to ISHS before her death
- First Basque Music Archive in United States

“Our community is indebted to Espe for fostering Basque spirit and communication in her very special way – with tact, diplomacy, and especially, with a sense of fun and an unbounded joy for living.”

– Bethine Church
Thanks for Attending!

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