**SNICKARS — Record Label**

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**Record Label Set Up—or—Following Files in Digital Music Distribution**

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Within a short space of time, ways of listening to new (and older) music have rapidly changed. If visions of a celestial jukebox two decades ago promised music in the cloud for everyone—this is now a reality, with Sweden’s Spotify as one of the foremost examples of the music industry’s technological transformation. The digital download model, however, still remains a key revenue stream. Yet subscription and ad-supported streaming services have grown from 10 to almost 30 percent of digital revenues in the last five years. As stated in the latest IFPI Digital Music Report 2014, ‘It is now clear that music streaming and subscription is a mainstream model for our business. In 2011, there were eight million paying subscribers to subscription services—today there are 28 million’. In the report, especially the Scandinavian countries are said to be a showcase of music industry revival—where Spotify has a total dominance—demonstrating the ‘regenerating potential of the streaming model’. Rediscovering older music is a key concept for Spotify, and the company has worked fiercely with constantly expanding and upgrading its catalogue. Spotify thus poses a number of challenges to traditional ways of handling music heritage—especially with regards to the ALM (archives, libraries, and museums) sector. Seamless access to music has simply led to alternative usage patterns, new forms of engagement, and the popularisation of older musical forms in ways that traditional cultural heritage institutions can never replicate. In short—when streaming heritage becomes a fact, what is the (new) cultural role of heritage institutions?

My presentation takes the form of a first report of a new research project, Streaming Heritage. Following Files in Digital Music Distribution. The project is financed by the Swedish Research Council—with approximately one million euro—and involves five researchers working on an interdisciplinary research team. The project is situated at HUMlab (Umeå University) and will run between 2014 and 2018. On a general level, the purpose of the project is to study emerging streaming media cultures, and the music service Spotify in particular, with a bearing on the digital challenges posed by direct access to musical heritage for memory institutions. However, the purpose is also both web historical and contemporary. On the one hand, this so-called Spotify project will track the development of online music cultures, from file sharing at Napster and the Pirate Bay to such legal streaming services as Spotify. On the other hand, it will follow files in digital music distribution by way of digital ethnographic methods. Research is, in short, conducted and based on the creation of a nonprofit record label in order to study unexpected file ‘behavior’. Programmers from HUMlab are involved in the research process. The record company acts as an innovative research tool, with the aim of following—or simply pursuing—digital music files throughout the intra-digital distribution process: from creation, via aggregation, and through to playback. Using various digital methods the ambition is to observe the files’ journey through the digital ecosystem—streaming media culture’s black box—normally not accessible to traditional media researchers. The basic idea is that digital (or digitized) media objects have changed the way in which they should be conceptualised, analysed, and understood—not the least from a heritage perspective. That is, a movement has taken place from studying static music artifacts to an increased scientific focus on dynamically active files with a kind of inherent information about factors such as broadband infrastructure, file distribution and aggregation, user practices, click frequency, social playlists, sharing, and repetition. During autumn 2014 we have initiated and started our record label, and via the aggregator RouteNote—‘a free way to get your music onto the world’s leading stores and distributors’—begun to track ‘our music files’. Research results will follow.