

Checked Out! Episode 8 Transcript

Kim Anderson: Hi there! And welcome to another episode of "Checked Out", which is the official podcast of the University Libraries and Teaching & Learning Technologies. My name is Kimberly Anderson. I'm the Director of Special Collections, and part of my job is administratively overseeing and supporting the Jon Bilbao Basque Library. The library is located on the third floor of the Matthewson-IGT Knowledge Center. Northern Nevada has had a long and rich history of Basque culture. Much of that history is reflected in the Basque library in the form of books, journals, ephemera, rare books, photographs, and other archival materials and media. It's a fabulous collection.

I'm proud to preserve these records to celebrate Basque culture and to serve as a window for English speakers into the Basque world. Today, Sasha and Sean are speaking with Iñaki Arrieta Baro - our Basque librarian, and the head of the Basque Library. Iñaki brings a sense of passion and pride to his job every day in addition to his depth of insight from knowledge of the diaspora and Basque culture both in Nevada and in the Basque country.

Ever since UNR transitioned to work from home in March, the Basque Library has been creatively continuing to provide support and education for our campus community and beyond. So, this is what they've been up to. Thank you for joining us for another episode of "Checked Out". Please enjoy the show. Thank you!

Sasha Soleta: Thanks for that great introduction. Um, I am Sasha, as always.

Sean Busey: And as sometimes, I am Sean. Welcome to "Checked Out", the University of Nevada, Reno Libraries' podcast. Uh, this was a fun episode for past selves to record.

Sasha: Yeah. They had a hoot this episode.

Sean: Yup. The conversation was just a delight to have.

Sasha: Yes.

Sean: It all started a couple of months ago, now. We got news that the Basque statue that was at the Nugget here in Sparks got moved outside of, the Carol Franc Buck Sculpture Garden which is by the outdoors entrance to the @One at the Knowledge Center, and that made some of us go, "Hey, you know who everybody really likes? Iñaki." And then that made Sasha and I go, "You know who we really wanna talk to, just 'cause he's cool to talk to?"

Sasha: Iñaki.

Sean: Iñaki!

Sasha: And you know what people need to know more about? Because it's hidden in the Knowledge Center. The Basque Library.

Sean: It is. It is. I feel like it's hidden in plain sight. It's right there, and so many people just miss it, which is a shame, 'cause just having the Basque Library in the Knowledge Center is a really cool resource. Talking to Iñaki about the Basque Library and the Basque community a little more broadly was just a joy.

Sasha: Yes. I really enjoyed it. And I hope you guys enjoy it too. It's something that's really interesting because I don't know a lot about these topics.

Sean: **Laughing**

Sasha: So I always like learning something new.

Sean: Same. I got...perfectly said. I can't sell it any better.

Sasha: All right. So past selves, take it away.

Sean: All right. So, with us today is the lovely, the super cool, Iñaki Arrieta Baro. Did I say that half approaching okay?

Iñaki Arrieta Baro: Yes. You said it perfectly, Sean.

Sean: All right. Yes.

Sasha: Yay, Sean! I'm glad you said it, 'cause I'd have butchered it. I'm sorry.

Sean: And Iñaki is the Basque Librarian. Thank you, first of all. Thank you for being with us, taking the time out of your day. I see that you are back in the office. You brave soul.

Iñaki: I am back at my office. Yeah. It's good to be here. It's still a strange feeling, you know. Everything is very familiar, and at the same time, there is something odd. You know? You are out of place.

Sasha: You have to think more about moving around in a building now, I feel like. You can't just be like I'm gonna pop over here really quick.

Iñaki: Yeah...yeah.

Sean: You feel like you're sneaking everywhere.

Sasha: Yeah. Basically.

Sean: I'm still at home and will be for the foreseeable future, so when I finally come back in, I feel like most everybody else will have found a normal and I'll just be like, "'Sup, guys!" Like it was a really long vacation or something. But everyone else is gonna be weirded out.

Iñaki: *Laughing*

Sean: Uh, so, Iñaki, as I'm sure you're aware, there's a pandemic going on.

Iñaki: No! Do tell!

Sean: *Laughing* Boy, do we have some bad news for you.

Sasha: Yes.

Iñaki: *Laughing*

Sean: So, uh, I guess to start with, how has the pandemic impacted the Basque community, both in the Basque Country, and then also here in the U.S.?

Iñaki: Well, uh, as you can imagine, the impact has been...has been huge, as has been with other groups and with society in general. The Basque country was one of the first places hit by the first wave in Europe, and in the first two weeks of March, and so it has been harsh. They were after Italy, the Basque country, and with it, Spain and France were some of the first countries in Europe going on lockdown because the amount of cases. So for almost two months the Basques were unable to leave home other than go to work, go grocery shopping or going to the doctor or the hospital. So, it has been difficult. It has been difficult, you know, even personally my family there, they all were healthy and they are all healthy but it has been...it was scary really, you know? Seeing what was going on and seeing how the hospitals were being filled by people and how many people were dying there. So it was...it was harsh. And now, the situation in the Basque country, it looks that it is under control there.

Sean: That's good.

Iñaki: Um, obviously, the impact is huge. They stopped the economic activity. But not only that, just the festivities. No parties. No, you know, cultural life. No Running of the Bulls this year in Iruña - Pamplona. Um, so it's big. It's big. Nothing very different for a lot of places, but there maybe the number of deaths has been a little bit higher than in other places in Europe. And then here in the U.S., the Basque community here has been impacted in some different ways. First of all, all the activities of the Basque clubs, of the Euskal Etxeak in the West were stopped. There was a halt on dance group rehearsals and everything. No, you know, no get-togethers, no lunches, no Mus championships, nothing. Even this year, it was the year of the Jaialdi, which is the large Basque festival in Boise, which happens once every five years.

Sean: Aw, man. That is terrible timing.

Sasha: Yeah.

Iñaki: It is. It is. You can't imagine. It's a huge festival. There is people going from all around the country and coming from Europe from the Basque country. And it takes a lot work to organize it. And...but even though they were one of the first, they decided not worth canceling it because, and they were aware that they couldn't move ahead in that situation. So, um, they canceled it, and hopefully, we'll have it next...next year. Something like Olympic Games and say, you know?

Sean: Yeah. Yeah.

Iñaki: Fingers crossed, next summer will be...will be different, because this year, as I say, almost all community activity related to Basque and groups around the country has been stopped. And then you have the community impact...you can see it in restaurants, in Basque restaurants around the country. The first one closing completely was the Noriega in Bakersfield. And just this week, we have learned that the Santa Fe here in Reno is closing, so 70...70 years of history in the city are gone because they were unable to continue going ahead with this situation. So, yeah. I mean, it's a shared, it's a shared experience. This pandemic is obviously, it's a global event and nothing we have seen before, but for each community, it's a little bit different. So, for the Basque community, this connection with the old country, and at the same been scattered around and not been able to get to where it has been probably the most visible impact.

Sasha: So, I know one big event that we usually have in Reno is we have a Basque Festival here, and that it has been canceled, right?

Iñaki: Right. Yes.

Sasha: But I know that as a library, you guys have access to archives from previous festivals, right? So can you tell us a little bit about that collection you guys have and how people can access it?

Iñaki: Sure. So, the Basque festival in Reno was happening next weekend, and as you said Sasha, it has been canceled. We have a wonderful collection of photographs related to everything Basque in the West. And everything Basque means that, yeah, we have a number of pictures of the festivals starting from the 1959 festival here in Sparks, Reno, that was one of the first ones. And it's that we have thousands of photographs that are related to Basque activities. And what happens during this get-together is that the main events during the year for the Basque community in each of the cities. So the Basque festivals usually happen during the summer, starting, end of May, until October, more or less, and almost every weekend you have one of these festivals in a city in the west.

Sean: That sounds really cool.

Iñaki: It is. It is very cool. I mean, yeah, it's special. You know, it's an opportunity to see people that you usually don't see and to continue your traditions and to see, you know, your kids dancing and having a good time with other people from your community. So it is really cool. So sad that we don't have that, but we will manage.

A part of our photograph collection is already digitized. We have around 5000 photographs online in our Islandora repository. And so just accessing our main page, which is library.unr.edu/basque, we have access from there to our photograph collections, to our archival collections, anything digitized is available from that starting point. And we do have search filters that will provide access to that collection. And always we are happy to have anyone contact us and help them finding what they need. You know, sometimes, some of our users aren't very, you know, they have some difficulty sometimes when they say, "Oh, this is online." And it's like, let me help you a little here. And we're always happy, as I say, to search for our users and to provide examples of festivals or dancing or anything that happens related to the Basque community.

Sean: That's great. Uh, so, on our list of things we have here is one I really wanna mention I've seen is the...your One Item A Day Campaign, or your One Photograph A Day Campaign. I'm not entirely sure if it's an item or a photograph all the time. But tell us about that, and just how...I guess I want to know what made you select certain images or objects to highlight.

Iñaki: Okay. So, um, we are calling this project One Item A Day. For now, it has been a selection of photographs, but we are planning to expand that and to showcase other items from our collection. We started this when we closed the library March 13th. One of our concerns was how to keep the connection with the community. You know, we serve obviously, our first our community of users is, here, the Center for Basque studies. And the campus community. But then, we have a number of community users, both from Reno and Northern Nevada but other parts of the country also. So, one of our concerns, when we closed the library, was big - how do we continue this conversation with our users, you know? So we'll try to be a little bit provocative with that and say, "we are going to showcase you what we can provide you - what is part of our collections. Uh, and so in spite of waiting for you to come here, we will showcase you one item a day of the collection." So we start this with the idea, oh, this is going to be a two weeks something. You know, we went home thinking it was going to be until the end of March, and then it was until April 28th and then here we are.

Um, but, we started it a little bit slowly. You know, let's choose five pictures. The first week I choose some of them, then our student workers will start taking part in this in this project. And Jack Casey, our Library Technician, has been also key on organizing how to move this ahead. One person that I want to mention there has been Elizabeth Lepe, one of our student workers. She worked with great interest on this project

that she has been the person picking most of these pictures and giving these wonderful comments about them. You know, I asked her - okay, I want a fresh view of this collection. I know maybe too much about what's going on, so maybe someone that is maybe not so familiar with what's happening, they can provide another view on the - you know, the cutting of the logs or the chorizos that they are having for lunch or something like that. And it has been...it has been wonderful. We have seen a huge spike in the number of...of users, and interactions in Facebook. Uh, we know from...from Nathan, from our data archivist, that the views, the number of accesses to our collection in Islandora has been increasing daily since we started this. So, this, I will call it a success in that regard because it has maintained that conversation with users, we have learned about new users that we didn't know about, we have been able to answer some questions regarding those pictures, and we have been able to learn about those same pictures, because you know, sometimes the metadata that we have about some of these photographs is not so rich. We know that this is a Basque festival, but we don't know where it's happening. And then you have a user here who says "Oh, you know, this is Ely or this is Elko 1978", and it's like "Oh. Great!" I want all that information, you know? So...

Sean: Yeah. that's fantastic.

Iñaki: It is. And it has been. Yeah, it has been very enriching for us, and to be able to continue something that you will say, okay, it's not so big. You know, it starts as quite humble project, and we say okay we are going to choose one picture and show it to our public in Facebook. And then it started slowly growing a little bit. And as I said, what we are planning now is to expand it and to continue doing it and to start providing a larger variety of items from the collection and say, "Okay, we have this archival collection of these letters from Lehendakari Agirre, whatever." And continue doing that in a more formalized way. We are doing that.

Sean: That's...and I think that'll be a...just a great way to...just to keep that consistent contact not only with the community but with the materials that you have. Like you said, possibly to even learn more about your own collections. I think that's really cool.

Iñaki: Yeah. Absolutely. It gives you that opportunity also.

Sasha: From what I hear, you had a conference planned in April that kinda got a little cut short.

Iñaki: Really?

Sasha: So, could you...do you mind talking about what that was going to be about? It's Basque improvised poetry, correct? And I do not want to butcher the name. So what...how do you pronounce that?

Iñaki: So the act, this improvised poetry, is called Bertsolaritza which literally means poetry.

Sean: Okay.

Iñaki: You know, so for Basques in Basque, poetry is Bertsolaritza is improvised poetry.

Sean: Okay.

Iñaki: So that's correct. We were having a wonderful conference here in April 9 and 10th, in collaboration with the Center for Basque Studies here, and with the Etxepare Institute in the Basque country and we were bringing poets, Bertsolaritzak from the Basque country and some of the also from here from the U.S. and we were having an academic program and then a cultural program with poetry sessions that were happening here. It was in the auditorium, and then the pandemic happened and March 11th, President

Trump decided to ban the flights from Europe. And that was it. We knew, I mean the last two weeks, I would say we were...we continued organizing and working with Jill Stockton from Marketing on the marketing to make it happen. We continued, you know, buying plane tickets for people coming from the Basque Country. Uh, we continued doing it. We had in mind that it was very possible that it wouldn't happen. And we needed to cancel it. We were focusing the conference and on Bertsolariak, or schools of poetry. We have almost one in every town in the Basque country. So you have at individual schools, they are very little and they learn how to improvise. And this has been a change in this art, because until very recently it was thought that, "okay this is something that is innate you know you have it, the art inside you but you can't learn it" so this Bertso schools that are start in the first 80's were a big change in the evolution of the art.

So right now, we continue to have the hope that we will be able to organize this someday, maybe next spring or the following one. In the meantime, we are in contact with all of the speakers that were going to attend the conference, and we are working, specifically, the Center for Basque Studies is working on a publication with the papers that were going to be presented at that conference. And so how to maintain that conversation going on and our reflection on what has been the impact of these schools in Bertsolaritza - in the Basque improvised poetry.

So we don't feel that we...it was a waste of time. No, nothing like that. It was disappointing for sure. We were expecting to have a good time, but I think that in the end, the fruits of that effort are going to be there, at least in the form of publication.

Sasha: It sounds interesting. It's almost kinda...is it like rap battle-esque, almost?

Sean: **Laughing**

Sasha: It's like freestyle rap, sort of, without song? Like, how could you best describe it to people who've never, like, heard it before?

Iñaki: Yeah, you can think about it in that way. Actually, one of the things we wanted to do during this conference was to have some local poets also interacting with the Basque poets.

Sean: Okay.

Iñaki: So you could have like that battle, let's say, with different framework with English-speaking poets and Basque-speaking poets, so yeah. It's...that's one of the aspects of this is the largest event related to Bertsolaritza, to Basque improvised poetry, is a championship, actually. There is a championship every four years. There is a national championship with a final that gathers around 15,000 people just to hear and watch poetry.

Sean: How...is this over one day, or multiple days?

Iñaki: Well, the championship itself [stammering] sorry. Itself goes... It starts as regional championships. So in each Basque region, you are going to have regional championships. And then the winners of those championships go ahead, something like the NBA or something like that. You know, they're local or regional to the national one. And then you have the playoffs, the finals. And just, the final is a one-time event with eight poets, eight Bertsolariak in one place doing different exercises, some of them very similar to battles to...and others more individualized or more personal ones. And, yeah. It's wonderful. It's wonderful to be there. It's the main attractive of improvisation is that you know that you are seeing and hearing something unique - completely new - and at the same time, so closely connected to the tradition and to the culture of your country. You know, that's very powerful.

Sean: That is. That's really cool. It almost sounds like a world cup for improvised poetry. That's super cool.

Iñaki: The Basque community, it's quite large here in Nevada. The impact of Basque culture is visible in the cultural landscape here in Nevada. So, if they wanted to learn about a culture that is quite specific both in regards of tradition specifically and of the language, I would like to invite them to visit us here physically, even at the Basque library or online at our webpage so they can access the resources that we have available for them. And we are always happy, as I say. We have users from all around the world, and we are always happy to provide support for research or papers or whatever both online or by phone or any other means.

Sean: That's great.

Sasha: Yeah

Sean: All right. Thank you, uh, thank you again for joining us, Iñaki, taking time out of your day.

Iñaki: Yeah. Thanks to you for having me. It has been a pleasure.

Sean: Awesome. All right. Great. So that was awesome.

Sasha: It was. I always like getting to talk to Iñaki.

Sean: Yeah. He's always a delight to talk to. He's a delightful dude. Uh, super interesting every time I get to hear about anything really to do with the Basques. Fascinating, fascinating stuff. Um, it's a shame that we had to cut the episode at like twice our normal recording time. *Laughing*

Sasha: I mean...

Sean: I could have easily gone for four.

Sasha: Yeah we could've easily just sat and talked to Iñaki for hours. Like when everything returns to normal, I say we all just go and have a nice big Basque dinner and just talk to Iñaki about things. With some Picon Punches.

Sean: Provided the Basque restaurants survive. He did mention the Santa Fe closing. Louis'?

Sasha: Louis' is still open.

Sean: We need you! We need you.

Sasha: Or my personal favorite, and I will argue it is the best, the JT down in Gardnerville, but you know, what can I say?

Sean: Okay. You've mentioned that place to me before. Not living in Gardnerville, I've never had the opportunity to go eat there. But I vote that when this is all over and restrictions are lifted and the world is no longer like an episode of The Walking Dead, we should go to Gardnerville and I should finally try it.

Sasha: I think you should.

Sean: It's been a long time and I still haven't, and that's on me. I wanna right that wrong.

Sasha: Because I mean how can you not love a steak sandwich that is a whole-sized steak on two tiny little pieces of bread?

Sean: *laughing* Yeah. So, the takeaway from the episode: Go to the Basque Library. Find out, learn about Basque people and culture. It's super fun. It's super interesting. It's enjoyable.

Sasha: And also, fun fact, you can take classes to learn Basque here at UNR. And I think we're one of the few institutions stateside that allows you to do that.

Sean: You can.

Sasha: So you can really spread your horizons.

Sean: Yeah.

Sasha: And I know they're always looking for students to join those classes, too.

Sean: Yeah. I hear learning Basque is quite the challenge, but honestly, it's such a cool people and such a unique thing for us.

Sasha: Yeah.

Sean: I don't see any problem. It's a very special opportunity.

Sasha: As proud northern Nevadans, you also have to have a little pride for the Basque culture and community, too, 'cause it's so intertwined here.

Sean: Yeah. I feel like it's cool just being adjacent.

Sasha: Mhm. I agree.

Sean: I'm not Basque at all, but growing up around it, it was always really cool to see. And it was cool to talk to Iñaki.

Sasha: You know what else is cool, Sean?

Sean: NPR voices for credits? Yeah.

Sasha: Yeah.

Sean: Yeah

Sasha: Let's do this.

Sean: It's...I wouldn't say it's one of my favorite things about the podcast, but it's up there.

Sasha: Yeah. It is up there for me.

Sean: *Laughing*

Sasha: And with that, credits!

Sean: *Laughing*

Sasha: All right. Your hosts today, as always, were Sasha Soleta and Sean Busey. Our guest today was Iñaki Arrieta Baro, Basque Librarian.

Sean: Uh, thanks as always to the Libraries Podcast team: Maggie Ressel, Michelle Rebaleati, Luka Starmer, Jill Stockton, and Joe Gurgui.

Sasha: And then a special thank you to Kim Anderson, Head of Special Collections and the Basque Library, for doing our introduction today. Uh, as always, the episode music was "Better Days" by Lewen Wilkstrom, courtesy of Universal Production Music.

Sean: Thank you, as always, for listening. Until next time, this is "Checked Out" checking out.