

The Society of American Archivists / Performing Arts Roundtable News

Issue for December 2001

[The Performing Arts Roundtable: Encourages the exchange of information on historical and contemporary documentation of music, dance, theater, motion pictures, and other performance media. (from the SAA Web site)]

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Summary of the 2001 Roundtable Meeting in Washington

Roundtable chair La Nina Clayton (George Washington University) called the annual meeting of the SAA Performing Arts Roundtable to order at 3:30 p.m. on August 31, 2001. There were approximately 30 people in attendance.

Following brief remarks about the 2002 program by Program Committee member Kris Kiesling, SAA Council member Tom Battle, who serves as Council's liaison to the Roundtable, stated that he was pleased to see that the Roundtable was operating in good order, as there had been some concern about this following the Denver meeting. Clayton turned to Newsletter editor George Bain who reported he had done only one issue during the year, copies of which were being distributed at the meeting. He stated he was passing around a sheet for those attending to sign and write down their institution and contact information.

Clayton then stated that she too had been concerned about the Roundtable following the Denver meeting. She was gratified to see the size of the group at the meeting. There was a brief discussion of the name for the newsletter in the past, which Kit Leary reported was *The SAA Muse* (she indicated she had copies on file at home). Clayton then asked the group to form a circle and introduce themselves. This revealed attendance by a broad representation of repositories with musical, dance and theater materials as well as organizations such as NEH and Safe Sound Archive. Members then spent time sharing information about their holdings, projects and concerns until the meeting adjourned at approximately 5 p.m.

Message from the Roundtable Chair

Where Do We Go From Here?

By La Nina M. Clayton

In August 2001 the members of the Performing Arts Roundtable had the opportunity to meet and discuss our collective fate as part of the larger Society. All those present agreed that the round table was worth continuing in order to support one another professionally and to serve as a vehicle through which we can generate ideas as to how we can explore, improve, and perform our roles as educators. Several months later I had an opportunity to attend the *21st Century Learner Conference: Exploring Community Partnerships for Lifelong Learning* sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Held in Washington, D.C., the conference was attended by over 300 archivists, librarians, curators, public television executives, information technology managers, and foundation directors.

After enthusiastic welcomes by Dr. Robert S. Martin, Director of IMLS, and Acting Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and Beverly Sheppard, IMLS Deputy Director, the question was raised, "Who is the 21st Century Learner?" As identified by one presenter, the 21st Century Learner is a lifelong learner whose education is self-directed, through a combination of formal schooling and free choice learning, facilitated by access to technological innovations. Keynote address speaker, Dr. David Carr,

Associate Professor at the School of Information and Library Sciences, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, called cultural institutions such as libraries, museums, archives, and the Internet catalysts for inter-disciplinary learning. Dr. Carr noted that these institutions have the responsibility for creating partnerships in a learning age to provide formal and free choice learning opportunities. By creating a culture of collaboration, these institutions increase social capital by providing access to information, monitoring information content, developing recognized standards, and ultimately, developing better educated consumers of information.

In line with the ideas expressed at the 21st Century Learner Conference I believe we, the members of the Performing Arts Roundtable, have an opportunity, if not an obligation to address the needs of lifelong learners. We can be successful in the 21st Century and beyond if we are committed to:

- Engaging in regular discussions about our holdings
- Strengthening the round table by supporting current members and recruiting new ones
- Raising the standards of professional practice by sharing information, coordinating conference session proposals, and developing collaborative grant projects
- Creating better access to holdings

Working with performing arts collections we have the unique opportunity to observe the creative process, and at the same time extend the life of an artist's work by preserving it and making it accessible for future study and interpretation. Please continue to support the Roundtable by submitting articles and announcements for the newsletter, developing session proposals, and sharing your knowledge and experiences with your colleagues. Until we are able to gather together again in Birmingham, enjoy each day for the gift that it is.

News Items

History of the Cleveland Orchestra

Here is information on the book Carol Jacobs reported on at the Roundtable meeting: *The Cleveland Orchestra Story: "Second to None"*, by Donald Rosenberg (Cleveland: Gray & Company, 2000). The 752-page book has a list price of \$40.00.

The listing on Amazon.com includes several short reviews of the book. Rosenberg, this text notes, is the music critic of a Cleveland newspaper. Jacobs reported the book gives a great deal of credit to the Orchestra archives throughout the book.

Save America's Treasures Grants Awarded to Performing Arts Projects

The US federal government's "Save America's Treasures" program is administered through the National Parks Service, Department of the Interior. A portion of the funds, however, is reserved for projects recommended by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). And two of the awards announced in September went to projects related to the performing arts.

The Alan Lomax Archives, New York, NY received an award of \$250,000 for its materials that document folk music and dance, to "assist in the preservation of the materials and make the video and audio recordings available to national and regional libraries."

The Ohio University Libraries, Athens, OH received an award of \$51,000 for the Alwin Nikolais and Murray Louis dance collection, for preserving and duplicating a total of 250 videotapes.

For more information check these web sites: NPS, <www2.cr.nps.gov/treasures> and NEA, <www.arts.gov/endownews/news00/2000SATlist.html>.

The National Film Preservation Foundations Cycle Deadline Soon

The National Film Preservation Foundation makes awards that target the preservation of films "that (1) were made in the United States or by Americans abroad, and (2) are not preserved by commercial interests. Nonprofit and public archives, including those in the federal, state, and local government, may participate." To participate in this year's round, groups must register with the NFPF by December 6; final applications are due January 11, 2002 for awards in the period May 1, 2002 – July 1, 2003. Awards will be announced in the spring.

The NFPF is a federally funded organization. Awards typically range in value from \$2,000 - \$5,000. For more information, link to the URL (use underscoring in the extender): <www.filmpreservation.org/grants_projects_laboratory.html>. If you have film that needs to be preserved and this year's timetable is too close, put the foundation on your calendar for next.

Reports from the Field

Editor's Note: This section is intended to be an avenue for the exchange of information to members of the roundtable about collections or other topics of importance on the performing arts. Ashley Yandle and La Nina Clayton have volunteered these pieces; the mailbox is now open for proposals for the next issue.

Improving Access to Black Mountain College Collections

By Ashley Yandle

Black Mountain College was an experimental school located in Black Mountain, N.C., a town in Buncombe County approximately 10 miles east of Asheville. Established in 1933, the purpose of the college was to educate the whole person, with added emphasis on the study of the arts and creative thinking. Despite the fact that Black Mountain College could rarely offer faculty more than room and board, a number of important teachers and artists were drawn to the school as part of the regular faculty or to participate in the school's Summer Institutes. Josef and Anni Albers, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, Charles Olson, M.C. Richards, and Xanti Schawinsky were only a few of those who taught at Black Mountain College. In addition, the success of several of the college's students (such as Ruth Asawa, Edward Dorn, and Robert Rauschenberg) helped to further the college's reputation in the area of the arts and the avant garde.

The character and focus of Black Mountain College shifted over time, according to the make-up of the faculty and students. Personal and ideological conflicts were common and sometimes lead to major changes in the college community. Lack of funds added to the stress of the situation, as did the school's physical isolation and its sometimes-strained relations with the local population. Eventually, the student enrollment and available funds dwindled

until the college was forced to close in 1956.

The North Carolina State Archives is the primary repository of materials relating to Black Mountain College. Since the donation of the college records in 1963, the registrar of the Archives has served as registrar of the college, providing transcripts and other information for former students. Although the student records are closed to the general public, the college records contain many other materials that are available for research, including minutes from board meetings, general subject files, faculty files, treasurer's files and a large collection of photographs. In addition, two collections of correspondence, interviews, and manuscripts give the background for the creation of two books about the Black Mountain experience -- one by Martin Duberman and the other by Mervin Lane. The Black Mountain College Research Project, which was conducted by the North Carolina Museum of Art, includes hundreds of interviews, documents, and photographs. The archive also has fifteen other collections of personal papers from Black Mountain College's former students and faculty.

The North Carolina State Archives, with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), is currently in the process of creating new finding aids for its collections and making them available on the web. As a part of this project, the archive is conserving many of the items that are

most at risk for preservation problems. This includes de-acidifying poor quality paper from the college records, reformatting about 160 hours of taped interviews from the 1960s and 1970s, duplicating 4,500 color slides of works by Black Mountain College artists, and encapsulating fragile manuscript items. In addition, the archive is trying to locate several interviewees and donors, or their heirs, in order to obtain releases for interviews and photographs that are not

currently open for research. Access to these materials is becoming increasingly important due to renewed interest in Black Mountain College and its influence. During the past eight months, the archive has had requests for information from researchers in Michigan, Maine, New York, Paris, Germany and Spain. This shows the value of grant-funded projects for collections related to the performing arts.

Ashley Yandle is an archivist with the North Carolina State Archives

Shall We Dance? Selections from the Dance Archives of the Greater Washington Region

By La Nina M. Clayton

On any given night of the week in Washington, D.C. a dancer is taking the stage at The Kennedy Center, Dance Place or The George Washington University's Lisner Auditorium. But the dancer alone does not a performance make. Choreographers, lighting directors, story directors, set designers, musicians, and costumiers work tirelessly behind the scenes, creating an almost seamless process for our enjoyment. The legacy of some of these artists is documented in the exhibition, *Shall We Dance? Selections from the Dance Archives of the Greater Washington Region* on display at the George Washington University Special Collections Department in the Gelman Library through December 21, 2001. Among the collections featured in exhibition are:

The George Washington University Dance Program began in 1926 as part of the Physical Education Department's course offerings for women. In the mid-1930s introducing modern dance to the existing courses of natural dance, character dance, and clog/folk dance expanded the dance curriculum.

Maida Withers: The Utah native began teaching dance at The George Washington University in 1966. Since 1975 she has directed the Dance Construction Company "to create and produce original performance works for stage, sites and video in a collaborative process with performing and visual artists. Her recent work, *Aurora 2001*, investigates the relationship between the human body, technology and natural environmental phenomena.

Jan Van Dyke co-founded the Georgetown Workshop Dance Studio in 1967. Her interest in dance education has led to positions with the Footwork Studio and Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London, England. Now based in North Carolina, she is an assistant professor of dance at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro and is actively involved in the annual North Carolina Dance Festival.

Dana Tai Soon Burgess, founder and director of the Moving Forward Company, has received critical acclaim for his synthesis of Eastern and Western aesthetics. His choreography has been commissioned and presented by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the United Nations, and the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors. Recent performances of his choreography, *Helix*, and *Gandhara*, integrate light and sculpture as performance partners.

St. Mark's Dance Company and Studio was established by Mary Craighill in the 1960's to re-establish dance as an expressive, non-vocal means of communicating the liturgy. Craighill also used dance to break socio-economic barriers to artistic development and appreciation.

La Nina Clayton works in the Special Collections Department of the Gelman Library, George Washington University in Washington, DC. She is currently serving as chair of the roundtable.

Spanish Dance Society USA was created to provide a structured method of training and certification for the many styles of Spanish dance. For her dedication to the preservation of Spanish dance heritage, founder Marina Keet Grut was named Dame of the Order of Queen Isabela of Spain, the highest honor bestowed upon non-Spaniards.

Adriana was inducted into the American Academy of Middle Eastern Dance Hall of Fame in 1993 in acknowledgement of her role supporting Middle Eastern dance heritage. *Shadows on Yellow Silk*, a documentary chronicling her life and artistry was premiered at the Mary Pickford Theatre at the Library of Congress in 1997.

Shall We Dance? demonstrates how we can continue to preserve our dance heritage by identifying, saving and making accessible the historical record. An ephemeral art form, dance is uncovered through dance notation, photographs, costume illustrations, set designs, and the like. Using these primary sources, dance can be recreated for study and performance by artists, historians, and students of dance.

Editor's Corner

Vision for the Newsletter (Short-Term)

As your roundtable newsletter editor, it is my hope that you find this issue useful. Coming to the roundtable somewhat new, I have no connection with the “old days” more than three years in the past. Please consider this to be a publication that is evolving and will no doubt continue to evolve. Your comments are welcome. Do you, for instance, like the sections? Can you suggest more? What more do you need from the newsletter? Please stay tuned—and please do not hesitate to be in contact.

Newsletter Title

The current title for the newsletter is descriptive but also very prosaic. This year's business meeting brought up the shared information that once the roundtable newsletter bore the title *The Muse*. The question presented here is this: Do we want a different title? Should we return next year to the old title? Should we develop a new title, e.g., *Performance!* Are there other possibilities? (If there is a contest, your editor will be happy to present the winner with a king-size Snickers bar!)

Better yet, who is willing to serve on an ad hoc committee to develop a recommendation for next year's business meeting? If you are, please be in touch with roundtable chair La Nina Clayton.

The Next Issue

The intended date for the next issue of the newsletter will be early March.

One idea for an item will be a list of web sites useful for all members of the roundtable. Please submit web sites you think should be included to the editor. And if someone would like to compile (and perhaps annotate) the list, please get in touch with the editor.

Newsletter Distribution

The method for distributing this newsletter is as a Word document sent as an attachment to an e-mail message to the subscription list maintained by the editor.

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