

# The Society of American Archivists / Performing Arts Roundtable News

Issue for August 2002

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*[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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# *Message from the Roundtable Chair*

## **Words for Summer 2002**

By La Nina Manaigo Clayton

### **See You in “Magic City”**

For the past two years it has been my privilege to serve as chair of the Performing Arts Roundtable. In that time I have had the pleasure of working with our SAA Council Liaison, Dr. Thomas Battle, newsletter co-editor George Bain, and most recently newsletter co-editor, Ashley Yandle. Not long ago the roundtable was on the verge of dissolution due to a lack of participation. But through your support the roundtable is not only alive but thriving. Roundtable meetings in Denver and Washington, D.C. have seen our numbers increase as well as encourage the development of new session proposals. It is my hope that you will continue to support the Performing Arts Roundtable now and in the years to come. Volunteers are needed lead the roundtable and help shape its future.

Similarly, SAA needs your support in other areas as well. As an organization we are only as good as our membership. Start thinking now about how you can serve by presenting a paper, serving as an officer, or contributing an article to *Archival Outlook*. Birmingham, Alabama is the host city for what appears to be an exciting and informative 66th annual meeting. “Archival Roots: Our Foundation and Our Future,” promises to engage both seasoned professionals and the newly minted alike. In addition to 60 (count ‘em!) sessions, this year’s conference will feature six sessions on core areas of professional practice by noted archival experts entitled, “Archives Unplugged.” And, as in years past, the plenary sessions, caucus meetings, workshops, and tours are designed to educate, stimulate, and reinforce our professional values.

Make it a goal to cast your professional nets even wider at this year’s conference by doing one or more of the following:

- Attend the Performing Arts Roundtable meeting on Friday, August 23rd from 4:45-6:15 p.m.!
- Attend at least one plenary session!
- Attend the annual business meeting!
- Introduce yourself to new members and Council members alike!
- Visit a roundtable or caucus unrelated to your present position!
- Bring your business cards (and plenty of them!)

Thank you again for your support of the Performing Arts Roundtable—I’ll see you in “Magic City.”

## *News Items*

### **Session of Interest in Birmingham**

A session idea that took form at last year's Roundtable meeting is on the schedule for the Birmingham conference. "Front and Center: Revelations from Documents of Black Musicians and Musicians' Unions" (session #38) will be on Friday at 3 p.m. Roundtable chair La Nina Clayton will moderate the session. Please bring similar ideas to Birmingham—or start working on them now!

### **NEA Invites Contacts for the "Save America's Treasures" Program**

Doug Sonntag, whose responsibilities at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) covers the areas of Dance/Design/Media Arts/Museums/Visual Arts, was in attendance at the NIPAD conference described elsewhere in this issue. Sonntag there encouraged more applications related to dance treasures. For more information contact him at 202/682-5452 or visit the NEA at <[www.arts.gov/](http://www.arts.gov/)>; the list of staff on its web site indicates other officers who have responsibility for the areas of theater and musical theater.

### **A Concert as an Epiphany**

The featured plenary speaker at the Dance USA biennial conference (with which the NIPAD conference covered elsewhere in this issue was a part) was Alberto Ibarguen, publisher of the *Miami Herald* and *El Neuvo Mundo*. Ibarguen recounted a fascinating epiphany he had in college came from the opportunity to hear a concert by the musician John Cage. Cage's performance was to roll ball bearings down a line of descending metal plates (one imagines a gigantic stair-step xylophone) beside which were a number of microphones to capture and amplify the sound that was generated. This idea of a concert, said Ibarguen, was an epiphany that opened him to appreciating many an imaginative leap in the arts during his adulthood.

### **Information on a Repository**

A correspondent has written with the following information: The Washington Area Performing Art Video Archives (WAPAVA) at the Washingtoniana Division of the DC Public Library currently hold approximately 200+ videotapes of primarily theater, dance and mime performances. The Division also holds the records of the National Ballet and a few smaller dance troupes. The WAPAVA adds approximately 35-40 tapes per year.

### **New Booklet Available**

The American Assembly has released a publication *Art, Technology, and Intellectual Property*, edited by Margaret J. Wyszowski, that may prove useful. Hard copy booklets were distributed at the NIPAD conference discussed elsewhere in this issue. The study is also available online <[www.americanassembly.org/ac/atip\\_na\\_main.htm](http://www.americanassembly.org/ac/atip_na_main.htm)>. The Assembly's e-mail address is <[amassembly@columbia.edu](mailto:amassembly@columbia.edu)>.

## ***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. We have solicited the article by Sayeed Choudhury on the Optical Music Recognition (OMR) project at Johns Hopkins University. And having joined the Roundtable due to receiving a major dance collection and needing to learn more in this area, co-editor George Bain has contributed a report on the culminating NIPAD conference.

### **The Optical Music Recognition Project Continues at Johns Hopkins University**

*By Sayeed Choudhury*

The Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music, part of the Special Collections of the Sheridan Libraries at Johns Hopkins University, comprises nearly 30,000 pieces of music. The collection provides a rich, multi-faceted view of life in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, featuring famous songs such as “The Star Spangled Banner” and “Yankee Doodle Dandy”, along with engravings, lithographs, and many forms of early photo reproduction of song covers. Consequently, scholars from various disciplines have used the collection for both teaching and research. In the early 1990s, the Sheridan Libraries considered the need for preservation of the Collection, while acknowledging the need for continued access. The Sheridan Libraries considered both microfilming and digitization to meet the goals of reducing the handling of the physical collection, and enhancing access.

Through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in 1994, the Sheridan Libraries began

the process of digitizing the Levy Collection. This effort represented one of the first major digitization projects for an academic research library. The Libraries hired a subcontractor to implement and manage the digitization process. The workload associated with digitizing the Levy Collection proved difficult, especially given the need for inspection and editing images, and for incorporation of metadata. In fact, largely due to the project, the subcontractor declared bankruptcy, leaving the digitization effort in the hands of Sheridan Libraries staff. The project team quickly realized that the workflow process, consisting of disparate and distributed software tools and human labor, was inefficient. Given this experience, the Digital Knowledge Center (DKC) of the Sheridan Libraries submitted successful proposals for the development of a digital workflow management system to the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Digital Libraries Initiative (Phase 2) and the Institute for Museum and

Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership Grant Program. The Levy family and a technology entrepreneurial group in Maryland provided additional funding. It is envisaged that this workflow management system will reduce the costs associated with large-scale digitization by providing a suite of open-source processes, tools and interfaces that facilitate conversion of and subsequent processing of print materials.

One of the key components of this workflow management system is optical music recognition (OMR) software. The OMR software automatically recognizes and interprets musical symbols from digitized images of sheet music. Ultimately, OMR produces three files: a plain text representation of music score in a format known as GUIDO, a computer playable sound file known as MIDI, and a file containing the full-text of the lyrics (when appropriate). While the process is more complicated, OMR works with images of music somewhat similarly as OCR works with images of text. OMR reflects the emphasis of the workflow management system in that it reduces, but not eliminates, human intervention.

There are commercial OCR software packages, but the Levy OMR software offers several advantages. It is:

- Open-source
- Platform independent
- Able to run in batch mode
- Able to extract lyrics
- Able to produce a searchable, logical presentation of music
- Able to “learn” different types of musical and other symbols (i.e., it is

adaptive and able to “learn” from its mistakes, with appropriate human intervention)

The first step in the OMR process consists of “training” the software to recognize various symbols. As OMR “recognizes” symbols and interprets them, a person inspects and corrects any mistakes made by the software. Once this initial training is complete, the system is ready to perform batch processing on a large-scale, guided with the information from the training session. An optical music interpretation (OMI) process is executed once for each complete musical score, which might consist of multiple pages. For example, the Levy Collection averages about four music pages per piece.

As mentioned previously, the OMR software generates both GUIDO and MIDI files. The GUIDO files are used as input for a search engine that has been developed by the Digital Knowledge Center. Individuals are able to key in a sequence of notes, or tap a rhythm with their mouse, and the search engine will identify pieces from the Levy Collection that match the query. Multiple media players can play MIDI files, on any computer with speakers (even internal speakers). The combination of an automated software tool, and strategic human intervention, results in a semi-automated process for creation of MIDI files.

The project team is ready to test the OMR software with a subset of the Levy Collection. This activity will provide feedback for additional calibration and refinement of the OMR software. Finally, it will provide an “experiment” to compare the efficiency of OMR

software with a fully manual approach (i.e., hiring individuals to hand key the pieces of music into MIDI format).

An online guided tour of the OMR process is available at <http://mambo.peabody.jhu.edu/omr/demo/>.

*Sayed Choudhury <sayeed@jhu.edu> is Hodson Director of the Digital Knowledge Center at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.*

## **NIPAD Wraps Up: What and Where Next?**

*By George W. Bain*

In 1993 the Pew Charitable Trusts provided funding for the National Initiative to Preserve America's Dance (NIPAD) program. NIPAD—pronounced “knee pad”—concluded in June 2002 with a two-day conference in Miami, FL designed to assess its accomplishments and to peer into the future. Nearly 50 people—performers, cinematographers, electronic technicians, and archivists—participated in the conference that convened in conjunction with Dance/USA's tenth biennial meeting.

What follows are one person's observations on the conference and the salient points gleaned from it as they pertain to the archival field. First of all the dance profession appreciates the archival endeavor and regularly builds archivists into the collaborative efforts required for documenting and preserving this field. Second, the discussants in all groups saw the past decade as a continuum of dynamic changes. For instance, the level of quality in cinematography has continued to advance dramatically in this brief time.

On the first day, after introductions and general opening remarks, the attendees separated into four groups—archivists and preservationists, film and videographers, technologists, and documentation/performers. In my group's report leader Madeleine Nichols of the Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts summed up our discussion by asking, when is the work ever done? To this she responded, it isn't. Most of the projects achieved measurable accomplishments but the archival work has continued in order to complete parts not yet done or to take advantage of newer opportunities. (For instance, projects of the mid-1990s that created CD-ROM products are now moving their content to web sites.) Summing up the discussion of the other groups, the Documentation group reported the salient comment from one participant who called for reaching out more broadly in the academy, for example having journalism criticism classes review performances in their colleges and universities. Another point was that modern dance is at a disadvantage in that it lacks classic footage in popular films the way music

(and other performing art forms) do. The attendees in the Technology group reported that people at UCLA are hoping to launch an international dance journal to be issued on DVD.

In a second day breakfast meeting of archivists, chair Elizabeth Aldrich, Executive Director of the Dance Heritage Coalition (DHC), spelled out the DHC's stake in overcoming isolation with partnership and collaboration. Aldrich mentioned its site with more than 50 dance collection finding aids plus links to even more <[www.danceheritage.org](http://www.danceheritage.org)> and its internship program for archival efforts in dance companies now in its second cycle. She also noted other organizations whose efforts are important for the archival endeavor in the field of dance, in particular the National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage (NINCH) and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). The meeting concluded with a discussion of the best strategies for collection building—is it better for one repository to use the vacuum cleaning approach or is it better (in the end stronger) to rely upon a regionalized approach?

After time for the Dance/USA conference's plenary speakers the NIPAD conference concluded with a look ahead along with final observations from the field on what had been accomplished. Marian Godfrey of the Pew Charitable Trusts gave an address, "What Does Cultural Policy Have To Do with Dance?" In defining "cultural policy" Godfrey noted the Pew Trusts' Culture Program works in four domains: arts, humanities, preservation and folk life communities, and puts an emphasis on cooperation and collaboration for

areas in which government, philanthropic organizations, corporations and individuals all contribute. She noted that one way the Pew Trusts can contribute to cultural policy advocacy efforts is through assisting with the collection of good data and good stories. It is now supporting the recently formed Performing Arts Research Coalition (PARC), a coalition of five national service organizations NSO's—the American Symphony Orchestra League, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, Dance/USA, OPERA America, and Theatre Communications Group. The Pew Trusts has pertinent content at its web site <[www.pewtrusts.com](http://www.pewtrusts.com)> searchable under "cultural policy." (One of the studies she spoke about, *Policy Partners: Making the Case for State Investments in Culture*, by M. Christine Dwyer and Susan Frankel, is now available.) Godfrey noted that support for dance has increased but an even greater demand has outstripped the resources that have been supplied, so one of its strategies now is to support at higher levels efforts for advocacy.

Two speakers provided personal perspectives as the parting note. Bonnie Oda Homsey, Artistic Director of the American Repertory Dance Company, noted how over a twenty-year period the quality of videography is so much better now. With arts literacy more accepted now, she added, advocacy and networking efforts must maintain a balance between the field's legacy and its ongoing (pioneering) movement forward. Norton Owen, archivist at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, couched his remarks in change and its pace. New technologies, he noted, have caused both push and pull for everyone in their

rapidity. The fruit of NIPAD has been in the interconnections developed over its time and the charge for the future is to

continue with maintaining these connections and building new ones.

*George Bain is head of Archives & Special Collections in the Ohio University Libraries, the repository for the Alwin Nikolais/Murray Louis modern dance collection (supported by NIPAD) as well as the Sammy Kaye Collection, in Athens, Ohio.*

## ***Editor's Corner***

### **Editorial Staff Changes**

Ashley Yandle has volunteered to help with the Performing Arts Roundtable Newsletter. With this issue she becomes Co-Editor.

### **The Next Issue**

The expectation for the issuance of the next issue of the newsletter is early November.

The co-editors are open to suggestions for articles for the newsletter. We hope the article on optical musical recognition in this issue is informative. We will appreciate your ideas for timely topics, etc. and suggested writers. We will accept your volunteering an article or news items. And the antenna will be up during the Roundtable meeting in Birmingham.

### **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 editors.

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