

PERFORMANCE!



The Newsletter of the Society of American Archivists’ Performing Arts Roundtable

Issue for Fall 2004

[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: Creating a More Dynamic Roundtable

By Bridget Carr

At the summer meeting of the Roundtable in Boston, we discussed modifying the governance of the Roundtable. There was a consensus that it made sense for two co-chairs to serve staggered two-year terms. I am pleased to announce that Karen Spicher of Yale University volunteered and was duly appointed to serve as co-chair. Karen and I will serve as co-chairs together this year. A new co-chair will be appointed at the August meeting in New Orleans to take my place. Karen will serve through the summer of 2006. I believe that adding a co-chair will provide some continuity of leadership and will also infuse some energy and an additional perspective. Thank you for volunteering, Karen!

While we all seem to enjoy the informal nature of the roundtable, I sense that we need to adopt some more tangible objectives in order to serve our members, the archival community, as well as performing arts organizations that might seek assistance. Our membership represents diverse types of performing arts collections that exist in a wide range of types of repositories, including historical societies, libraries, colleges and universities, as well as those that exist in within performing arts organizations themselves. I would like to call on those of you who are active in allied performing arts-related professional organizations to make a point of keeping your fellow Roundtable members informed about research trends, projects, conferences, and preferred practices. *Performance!* is the perfect vehicle for information sharing. In addition, I would like to see Roundtable members reporting on the activities of related professional organizations at our yearly meeting. One of the best ways we can serve our members is to share information and ideas!

Report on the Roundtable's Annual Business Meeting

The SAA Performing Arts Roundtable met in Boston on Thursday afternoon, August 5, 2004 beginning at 5:30 p.m. with nearly twenty-four persons in attendance.

Chair Bridget Carr called the meeting to order and welcomed the group. SAA's liaison from Council, Joel Wurl, spoke briefly about points of concern to both Council and the roundtable (e.g., the policy on fiscal practices on allowable expenditures for t-shirts). Robert Horton, representing the Program Committee for the New Orleans meeting in 2005, followed with words about its hopes and the deadline for submitting session proposals. Kathleen Williams from the NHPRC also made brief remarks about several efforts the Commission hopes to get off the ground.

Carr then made her report, in which she urged the roundtable adopt a new leadership structure, with either a vice chair who would move into the chair during a second year or two co-chairs

with staggered terms. She added Karen Spicher was willing to take on one position and volunteered to stay on another year to get the new structure started. The roundtable members decided to adopt co-chairs to lead the group. So Carr will serve for an additional year and then rotate out; Karen Spicher will serve as a co-chair to the annual meeting in 2006.

Newsletter co-editor George Bain reported there had only been two issues of the newsletter during the year. He is willing to continue and asked for a volunteer to help with editor work as Ashley Yandle was stepping down. Actually, Yandle had volunteered to serve as the roundtable's web master and was working on a draft site. Bain reported her interest in having repositories submit photographs of performing artists that could be used for illustration on the site. Bain added that her goal is to have a site ready for review later in the calendar year.

Carr then opened the floor to reports and attendees introduced themselves and provided information on current developments, projects, etc. With business conducted, the Performing Arts Roundtable merged with the Recorded Sound Roundtable to hear a presentation by David Seubert who provided a handout with amplification on a "Guide to Standards and Recommended Practices" for materials and collections with imaging requirements. The list included links to technical documents issued by standards organizations such as ANSI and ISO.

Submitted by George Bain

News Notes

News Items from the Boston Conference

There were several points mentioned during the round robin at the annual meeting in Boston worthy of further note:

- Harvard University had an exhibit on Balanchine that had received coverage in the *New York Times*
- The Chicago Symphony Orchestra is celebrating its centennial this year in November
- The archives at the New England Conservatory of Music has received an NHPRC grant
- The Cleveland Orchestra has placed items as part of the Ohio Memory online scrapbook <www.ohiomemory.org> which may be searched through the contributor index.

Library Trustee's Generosity Helps NYPL

Also mentioned in Boston was the way New York Public Library trustee Robert Wilson has donated to the library, with a significant portion designated for the Performing Arts Processing Project. Upon request, Mary Ellen Rogan has supplied additional information. With a seven year project nearing the mid-way point, the library branch has processed collections that include Jerome Robbins and Patricia Zipprodt.

New ICA Publication on the Records of NGOs

The International Council on Archives (ICA) has announced a new publication on which note is taken. The publication is *The Records of NGOs, Memory... To Be Shared: A Practical Guide in 60 Questions* by Armelle Le Goff, senior curator of the Historical Centre of the French National

Archives, (ISBN/ISSN 2-9521932-2-3). (An NGO is a non-governmental organization.) For more information, visit the ICA web site <www.ica.org/biblio.php?pdocid=171>; it is best reached through the link.

Report on the Tour of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Archives

A party of six took up the offer of Boston Symphony Orchestra archivist Bridget Carr to tour her shop on Wednesday, August 4. Seeing the materials was exciting and seeing the exhibits developed by the archives, both long term and short term, placed around Symphony Hall was informative and instructive. A splendid experience and a nice way to begin the conference!

Boston Symphony Orchestra Announces Telecasts on DVD

The Boston Symphony Orchestra, Video Artists International (VAI) and WGBH-TV have announced a worldwide distribution agreement for DVD releases of telecasts from the BSO archives. The news story was released on November 19, 2004. The original releases include concerts conducted by former BSO Music Director Charles Munch and guest conductor Sir John Barbirolli. The VAI/BSO Archival DVDs will be available through all major music and video outlets and through the BSO web site <www.bso.org>. For more information contact Bernadette Horgan, Director of Media Relations (<bhorgan@bso.org> or 617-638-9285).

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.

The articles in this issue both happen to be on archival aspects of the opera, a performing arts field not previously covered in recent times in the roundtable newsletter. In the first report Terry Brown recounts the impact of the 2001 flood in Houston, Texas and how the Houston Symphony has taken measures to avoid a repeat. In the second report Lee Stout tells, in a magazine column reprinted here, about the archival measures taken to document a specially commissioned opera that was commissioned for Pennsylvania State University during the bicentennial of the American Revolution in 1976.

Out of the Basement!: The Formation of the Houston Symphony Archives, 2001-2004

By Terry Brown

For years it was the dream of the Houston Symphony's Education Director and myself

to start an archives for the organization. Bits and pieces of our history had been farmed

out to various institutions, and few, if any, of our staff were aware of those repositories.

Tropical Storm Allison wiped out most of our archives in June 2001, when Houston's Theatre District Parking Garage wall collapsed from the force of rising waters in Buffalo Bayou. (What the Symphony called its "Archives" were a bank of file cabinets in the Public Relations file room, where our photographic history was jammed into files in a very un-archive-like way.) Jesse H. Jones Hall, which adjoins the garage, is our city-owned performing space, with administrative offices located underneath street level.

When the garage wall broke, a tidal wave rushed through the connecting tunnel into our offices, pushing furniture and files cabinets through walls. In addition, water kept pouring in from the bayou, ultimately filling up the underground parking and the Jones Hall basements, three levels deep. When the rain stopped, it took at least four days to pump the water out of Jones Hall. Not only did the Symphony lose all its computers, furniture and working files, but the music library was also a disaster.

The records of General Maurice Hirsch, an important patron and trustee, had been stored on the lowest level, but entry by the staff for recovery was not permitted by the City of Houston. The water was contaminated by sewage, gasoline and debris, and there was no electricity. It was deemed unsafe, so recovery was left to city employees who went down in clean suits and scooped up anything that had not turned to mush.

What soggy records could be retrieved were then sent to Blackmon Mooring, to be frozen, dried out, and treated for mold. Because the flood impacted so many

businesses and institutions, it took nearly a year to return our records.

After the flood, there was no question that [an archives unit] must be started

What was particularly distressing was that only six months previously, we had begun discussions with management to create a formal archives. After the flood, there was no question that one must be started. We met with a small committee of interested parties among the staff, trustees and volunteers to outline immediate needs and the goals of the Archives.

Our efforts have been helped by the fact that Ginny Garrett, the former Education Director, also played percussion in the orchestra, so her tenure with the Symphony spans about 40 years. She also attended performances while growing up in the Houston area. As a former CPA, I owe my interest to having been an archives volunteer at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston for the past eighteen years. I had the luck to work there with several superb archivists, including Kathleen Robinson Williams and Lorraine Stuart. As a governing director and trustee of the Houston Symphony, it was also helpful that I served on the Executive Committee during the last few years.

By February 2002, Ginny and I provided direction and regular office hours for one day a week, and solicited volunteer labor. We began by creating an outline of various record groups and collecting materials from donors, mostly trustees, volunteers and musicians. A very small workspace became available in the Symphony's development offices (not basement level!) and was stocked with a computer and surplus Symphony furniture. In the first full year of operation, we ordered necessary archival

supplies and began processing the donated records. By January 2003 steel shelving was installed.

An appeal to the Symphony audience for assistance in the fall of 2002 brought materials such as photographs, concert programs, tour programs, news clippings and other materials. Donors include current and former orchestra members, ticket patrons, trustees, and long-time volunteers. Wonderful items surfaced from our audience this past February, when we made another appeal for donors to bring their treasures to the Houston Symphony's 90th Birthday Concert. Who would imagine that they would have saved a 1958 season brochure and many concert programs, decades old?

As we searched various websites for information on the Symphony, we were thrilled to learn that not only do they keep recently recorded concerts, but there is also an extensive collection of decades-old concert recordings at the University of Texas. They also are the repository for many of Miss Ima Hogg's papers related to us. Miss Hogg was a founder of the Houston Symphony and a well-known benefactress in Houston. The University of Houston Libraries also have some of Miss Hogg's records, in the form of concert programs, which include our first concerts. But long forgotten by anyone at the Symphony was the collection that had been given in 1979 to the Houston Public Library, and is now part of their archives. A friend doing research there found an archives reference we might be interested in. What a moment when they wheeled out a cart with the first of fifty scrapbooks, beginning in 1931!

Because no formalized records retention schedule was in place, each department made decisions on what to send out to long-term offsite storage. Interviews with staff

members are now being conducted to help establish the organization's first formal records retention schedule. Three departments have initial drafts, and more interviews are scheduled.

The Public Relations department kept their files in Jones Hall, most of which were retrieved. Volunteers began to copy fifty boxes of flood-damaged news clippings and press releases in an ongoing project. Even though the contaminated records were dried and treated, the smell is noticeable, so copying is necessary.

Much time has been devoted to creating finding aids that did not previously exist: historical summaries; indexed databases for trustees; events chairmen; awards listings; and music competition finalists. We are in the process of creating databases for orchestra and staff members, concerts, and photographs.

As the staff has become aware of the services we can provide, they now think to call on us first for questions of an historical nature.

We began working on our oral history prospect list with Raphael Fliegel, former concertmaster and orchestra member for 50 years. We conducted three two-hour interviews with the violinist, who is now in his eighties and teaches at Rice University. The tapes of the interviews are being transcribed by volunteers. Recently, we provided more interviewee names to students of an oral history class at the University of Houston, who will provide tapes and transcripts to us when they are done.

With only a limited amount of processed records so far, we don't solicit or advertise research services, but do receive occasional

requests for information from staff and the public. As the staff has become aware of the services we can provide, they now think to call on us first for questions of an historical nature.

We've also done three exhibits: the first was an internal exhibit and open house for the staff and friends of the Archives; the second, at Jones Hall for two weeks in conjunction with the 90th Birthday Concert; and lastly, a small case at the October (Archives Week) exhibit of the Archivists of the Houston Area.

Although the Symphony is unable to move their below-ground offices from Jones Hall, we are reassured that the City of Houston has installed flood doors from the garage, to be used in the event of another such disaster. Our music library is now housed in a specially constructed loft in Jones Hall, which provides good protection from changes in humidity and temperature.

Terry Brown <archives@houstonsymphony.org> is one of two Volunteer Archivists for the Houston Symphony Orchestra, Houston, Texas. She has had extensive experience and leadership posts as a volunteer in the Houston area, including the presidency of the Houston Symphony League. She acquired an interest in things archival while volunteering for the Museum of Fine Arts.

Penn State Diary

By Lee Stout

As I think about my return to column-writing, we are still basking in the afterglow of the a damp but otherwise successful 4th of July fireworks show and the rousing kick-off to Penn State's year-long sesquicentennial celebration. Such events

The Archives is currently on the second floor of an office building in which other Symphony staff are located. There are no separate controls for our temperature and humidity, so we are hopeful that we can find an upper level space in Jones Hall. Three years after the flood, our size keeps us from accepting some records until we can find a larger space. Our meager budget constrains us to basic supplies, so we hope to find grant funding for our expansion as well as for conservation of water-damaged videotapes.

For two part-time volunteers, we've been very busy, but happy with our results so far. It would be a stretch to say that Tropical Storm Allison was a blessing in disguise, but it has helped us in our acquisition efforts. Our 100th Anniversary is only nine years away – we have a lot of work to do yet!

naturally prompt us to recall past celebrations, and one that sometimes comes to mind for me was both patriotic and a grand spectacle. The production of the bicentennial opera, *Be Glad Then America*, in February 1976 also happens to be one that

has a remarkable collection of documentation in the archives.

For those who do not remember it or were not around in '76, the opera was composed by Pulitzer Prize winner John LaMontaine, commissioned by the university's Institute for the Arts and Humanistic Studies originally as a vehicle for the Penn State choirs under the direction of the inimitable Raymond Brown. It grew into a full-blown opera with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in the pit under the baton of Boston opera impresario Sarah Caldwell, with a cast internationally-known soloists, and full-staging in the relatively new Eisenhower Auditorium.

Be Glad Then America was a remarkable piece of art recounting the run-up to the Revolution. There were many ingenious and dramatic pieces throughout the performance, including the Boston Tea Party, the boycott of British goods where dozens of tea drinkers sang while lining the acoustical cavities of Eisenhower's side walls in the most memorable bit of staging ever done there, and the skirmish on Lexington Green, with the shots (by ROTC students as the redcoats) zinging over the orchestra at patriots in the first rows of the audience. A sizable Liberty Tree became the centerpiece of the stage, usually surrounded by a swirling mass of choral and acting students as *We the People*. Accomplished professional soloists appeared as the Town Crier (David Lloyd), eight patriots (Donald Gramm), and King George III (Richard Lewis). Punctuating the action periodically was folk singer Odetta, as the Muse of Liberty.

The performances were recorded for worldwide broadcast over the Voice of America and there begins the archival story.

While sell-out crowds applauded the three performances with gusto, the critical reviews were also pretty good, something of an achievement in itself for a bicentennial celebration piece. All critics thought the choirs superb, but they reserved their greatest praise for the production itself. One said it was "as lavish and brilliantly executed as anything currently feasible in American musical theatre." The performances were recorded for worldwide broadcast over the Voice of America and there begins the archival story.

There were enough complications in this phenomenal confluence of performers and production that it made potential follow-up performances elsewhere unlikely. In the same way, rights issues for tapes of the actual performances were equally complex and thus no recording has ever been available for sale despite the archival preservation of acoustically-outstanding tape recordings prepared by LaMontaine himself. Nevertheless, one can still come to the archives and examine a wide variety of materials that document the development of the production and the actual performance itself.

We were also fortunate to secure from the composer, John LaMontaine, his papers documenting his work on the opera.

Much of this was collected in anticipation of a WPSX-TV documentary, which was broadcast later and is still accessible here. Over eighty preparatory production meetings were tape-recorded and some have transcripts. Oral history interviews were done with Raymond Brown, scenic designer and associate dean in the College of Arts and Architecture William Allison, and dean of the college Walter Walters.

There are many photographs, textual records from the Institute for the Arts and Humanistic Studies documenting the commissioning and production process, and design drawings for scenery and lighting also preserved in the archives.

Accompanying these are the various music parts and libretto, the stage manager's prompt book, and marketing information, among other materials.

We were also fortunate to secure from the composer, John LaMontaine, his papers documenting his work on the opera. LaMontaine drew his libretto from the contemporary documents of the Revolutionary era—the letters, newspapers, speeches, broadsides, poetry, doggerel, even the laws—and so he also gave us the

photocopies and books he consulted for sources of quotations. This included one forgotten volume checked out of the USC library a couple of years earlier, and returned by us with their thanks, and the fine waived.

It's difficult to know if this level of documentation for an opera is extraordinary for a university archives. It may be the norm in places like the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center and opera company archives in New York, Houston, and Atlanta. Nevertheless, the resources are here for the students and scholars who may find this remarkable experience in a public university's arts programs a worthwhile case study in opera production history.

Lee Stout < lys2@psulias.psu.edu > is the head of Public Services and Outreach, Eberly Family Special Collections Library in the Paterno Library, Pennsylvania State University. Stout was University Archivist for 26 years before assuming his present position. He is also a past president and fellow of SAA. This article is a reprint of one of his monthly columns for the Town & Gown Magazine published in the University Park, PA area, from which he had taken a year sabbatical during 2003-04. The article appeared originally in the issue for September 2004.

Editor's Corner

Your Newsletter

Being repetitious, the editor encourages feedback from the roundtable membership concerning this newsletter. Is *Performance!* serving you well? Can you suggest improvements? Do you have **News Notes** to share? For example, each of the items gleaned from the round robin at the Boston conference merits a complete entry. Please send these; editors should not be treated like the Maytag repairman. And as was said years ago, outreach is an administrative function! This is **your** newsletter, so let **your** voice be heard!

A Further Note on the 2004 Pittsburgh Performing Arts Conference

A **News Notes** item in the Spring/Summer 2004 issue took cognizance of the first National Performing Arts Convention that took place in Pittsburgh last June

<www.performingartsconvention.org>. For the record, here is a list of the primary and the associated convening groups involved with this first.

The four primary groups:

- American Symphony Orchestra League - <www.symphony.org>
- Chorus America - <www.chorusamerica.org>
- Dance/USA - <www.danceusa.org>
- OPERA America - <www.operaamerica.org>

And the other convening groups:

- American Composers Forum - <www.composersforum.org>
- American Music Center - <www.amc.net>
- Association of Performing Arts Presenters - <www.artspresenters.org>
- Chamber Music America - <www.chamber-music.org>
- Meet the Composer - <www.meetthecomposer.org>
- Music Critics Association of North America - <www.mcana.org>
- National Alliance for Musical Theatre - <www.namt.net>
- Theatre Communications Group - <www.tcq.org>

These are organizations with which archivists can potentially interact. The list is provided for your information.

Then again, if any reader is aware of archival staff with any of these groups, by all means please build a bridge between them and this group so the SAA roundtable can be in dialogue with them.

Articles in the Next Issue

If things go as planned, the Winter/Spring issue will include **Reports from the Field** by Norton Owen, curator at Jacob's Pillow Dance, and Anji Cornette from The Cutting Corporation. Look for the next issue to appear in early April.

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. The distribution figure is currently more than 80 people.

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