

# PERFORMANCE!



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

**Issue for Fall 2005**

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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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*Visit the Roundtable Web Site: [www.archivists.org/saagroups/performart/](http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/performart/)*

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## *Message from the Roundtable Co-Chair*

### **Roundtable Updates**

By Karen Spicher

Thanks to everyone who attended and contributed to our meeting in New Orleans in August. The devastating hurricane, which struck so soon after the conference, was a shock to everyone. Rachel Lyons, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival archivist, and our speaker in New Orleans, is now back at work in New Orleans (see update below). Meanwhile, SAA and other professional organizations are leading efforts for assistance and recovery. Please check out SAA's homepage (<http://www.archivists.org/>) for news of the SSA-SAA Emergency Disaster Assistance Fund, and other recovery efforts.

SAA's next annual conference will be a joint meeting with NAGARA and CoSA (Council of State Archivists) in Washington, D.C., July 31-August 6, 2006. Our Roundtable submitted two session proposals for the conference:

A special focus session, "Magnetic Tape Preservation: A New International Standard for Basic Assessment of Endangered Materials," to be conducted by Peter Brothers;  
and a panel discussion on NYPL's Wilson project, "More Than a Backlog Project: Bridging the Gap between Project and Infrastructure for the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts," to be led by our co-chair, Helice Koffler. Unfortunately neither proposal was accepted. The program committee noted that the competition was especially high this year, due to the joint meeting format. We could consider resubmitting these ideas another year, or perhaps incorporate content from one or both proposals in our Roundtable meeting agenda. Meanwhile, many thanks to Peter and Helice for their work and willingness to develop programming on these important topics.

This year we have started our first Roundtable listserv, utilizing a listserv service provided by SAA. As of November 2005, we have 16 subscribers. I would like to encourage everyone to consider subscribing, as a listserv is potentially very useful for announcements, discussion of common professional interest to Roundtable members, and as way of maintaining communication between our annual meetings. If you'd like to subscribe, please send a command "subscribe performarts Jane Doe" to: [imailsrv@lists.archivists.org](mailto:imailsrv@lists.archivists.org) (replacing "Jane Doe" with your full name). The address of the list is [performarts@lists.archivists.org](mailto:performarts@lists.archivists.org).  
Thanks, everyone, for your continued support of our Roundtable!

# News from Rachel Lyons and the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Archive

By Karen Spicher

I had the pleasure of speaking with Rachel by phone on November 29. After evacuating in advance of the hurricane and landing safely at her sister's home in New Hampshire, Rachel is now happy to be back in New Orleans, as of early November, and is working on recovery for the NOJHF archives.

Rachel reports that there was no flooding in her repository, which is located in the relatively undamaged French Quarter. She was able to prepare before the hurricane by moving materials from lower shelves, and covering stack areas with plastic sheeting. The building sustained some roof damage and leaks in the reading room. In addition to finding a contractor to repair the slate roof, the most immediate concern is to evaluate possible mold damage in stack areas that were without air conditioning for a month. Rachel is especially concerned about sound recordings, which include reel-to-reel tapes dating from the 1970s-80s. The NOJHF has applied for emergency grant funding offered by NEH for hurricane recovery, and is planning to apply for additional funding specifically for conservation assessment for the sound recording collection. In the meantime Rachel has been working with the Library of Congress to have the "Sounds of the Crescent City" collection, that which was admitted in the 2002 Registry of Recorded Sound, shipped to the LOC for preservation.

There is good news regarding the 2006 Jazz Festival, traditionally held during April-May. Plans are underway for this year's Festival, which is expected to be somewhat modified, due to damage sustained by the Fairground facilities. An announcement about the scope of this year's Festival will be made around December 15, and performers will be announced in mid January. See the Festival website (<http://www.nojazzfest.com>) for more information, including instructions for receiving email updates.

In addition to challenges at work, Rachel is dealing with repairs to her house, which unfortunately was flooded. She is living with friends in the meantime, and waiting for delivery of a trailer promised to each hurricane victim by FEMA. And...Rachel and her fiance Rick are planning a wedding, hopefully to be held on the weekend of St. Patrick's Day and St. Joseph's Day, which is one of their favorite New Orleans celebrations!

While mail service in New Orleans has not quite been restored (a letter postmarked August 27 just arrived on November 29th!), the NOJHF is up and running with an internet connection, phone, fax, and HVAC. Rachel promises us a future update on NOJHF recovery efforts. She can be reached by email at [archive@nojhf.org](mailto:archive@nojhf.org).

## ***News Notes***

### **New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, and the Hurricane Season**

The devastation of the 2005 hurricane season on the US Gulf Coast is hard to comprehend. Archivists were one of the last professional groups to have seen New Orleans as it was pre-Katrina. This issue includes a note on the challenges faced by the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival archives, on which roundtable members saw such a splendid presentation during the business meeting. But the devastation of the two hurricanes that lashed the region affected a very wide geographic area.

The Society of Southwestern Archives (SSA) and the Society of American Archivists (SSA) coordinated a response on the part of the archival profession; a number of regional groups and individuals have contributed to the fund established for assistance. If members of the roundtable have not yet contributed and can see their way to doing so, please make a contribution.

### **NPR Story on Herman Leonard Photos**

In addition to the Performing Arts Roundtable's concerns about the plight of the NOJHF archives and to the profession's concern for affected archival repositories, there have no doubt been many instances of media coverage as well. Kit Leary of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival passed along information about National Public Radio's September 25th story "Flood Imperils Work of Famed Jazz Photographer" on the problems then being faced by photographer Herman Leonard. To catch the story, go to

(<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4863541>).

### **New England Conservatory *Guide* Published**

The New England Conservatory of Music has announced the publication of *Guide to the Archives at New England Conservatory of Music*, made possible through the generous assistance of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Interested institutions may obtain a copy at no cost by contacting Mary Alice Mohr, Archivist/Records Manager, at 33 Gainsborough Street, Boston, MA 02115.

## ***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 for archivists in or with the performing arts.

The report in this issue by Greg Johnson speaks to how the University of Mississippi's Blues Archives has developed and maintained its focus on a single genre of music performance.

## Gathering the Blues: Collection Development in the Blues Archive

By Greg Johnson

Since opening to the public in 1984, the Blues Archive at the University of Mississippi has been comprehensively collecting blues music and materials about the blues. The mission has always been to acquire, conserve, and make accessible blues and blues-related materials in a variety of formats for scholars of the blues, African American studies, and southern culture. This article examines how the Blues Archive has retained a specific collection scope over the years and some of the difficulties encountered by this specificity.

The Blues Archive developed out of the collections Bill Ferris and others had started gathering for the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture in the 1970s. In the early 1980s, the Blues Archive was established to properly house these collections and provide a formal structure for collecting and organizing more blues materials. Since this time, the Blues Archive has grown to become a major research facility for blues scholarship. One of the larger collections that helped establish the Archive is B. B. King's personal record collection, consisting of over 8,000 LPs, 78s, and even some pre-blues Edison wax cylinders. When the University of Mississippi took over publication of *Living Blues* magazine in the early 1980s, the Archive acquired the magazine's massive photograph collection and large LP, 78, and 45 rpm record collections from Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel, two of the magazine's

founding editors. The business papers from Trumpet Records, the first label to record Elmore James and Sonny Boy Williamson II, have proven invaluable to blues scholars. Last Fall, the Archive received the personal collection of Sheldon Harris, record and sheet music collector and author of the first biographical dictionary of blues singers *Blues Who's Who* (Arlington House, 1979), which increased the holdings by about one-sixth. The Blues Archive now has almost 50,000 sound recordings, 20,000 photographs, over 900 posters, more than 3,000 books, several manuscript collections, and much more.

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In addition to primary source materials, such as photographs or original field recordings, the Blues Archive comprehensively collects published secondary source materials on the blues. The Archive regularly purchases newly released blues biographies and compact disc compilations and re-releases. These all allow the researcher to have access to a large body of blues materials in

convenient formats, allowing the originals to be better preserved.

While the major collecting focus has always been the blues, the Blues Archive used to collect more materials related to other southern musics as well as southern folklore. Recently, the Blues Archive has focused more on actual blues and less on non-blues southern folklore, in an effort to better focus limited resources and create a stronger collection.

But where does one draw the line between what is or isn't blues? It is fairly easy to determine what definitely fits into the "blues" category. B. B. King, John Lee Hooker, Memphis Minnie, and Robert Johnson all clearly fit into any definition of the blues. But what about Stevie Ray Vaughan? There is much gray area on the borders of a strict definition of blues. Is Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" really a blues? It was composed by Perry Bradford, a Jewish man from New York, does not follow a typical AAB blues poetic structure, uses a non-blues harmonic structure, and sounds closer to vaudeville than blues. Charley Patton recorded a number of songs that are not, strictly speaking, blues music. He often played ballads (e.g. – "Frankie and Albert"), spirituals, and various non-blues dance musics. The same goes for many soul blues artists. Some of Bobby Rush's recordings aren't exactly blues, but more akin to funk-based dance music. And what of the gospel singer Blind Willie Johnson who technically recorded no blues at all?

It would be unthinkable for me to exclude any of the above examples from the Blues Archive. In the case of Mamie Smith, "Crazy Blues" was one of the first recorded songs that showcased an African American singing in a distinctly African American style. It sold almost 80,000 copies in the first

month of its release and reached one million in a year. Its success helped usher in the era of "race recordings," paving the way for other blues artists to get recorded. While Patton did record a number of non-blues songs, he recorded a large body of blues that really helped define the Delta blues sound. Bobby Rush's songs "Hen Pecked" and "Sue" don't really musically fit into a blues definition, though Rush often lyrically/aesthetically draws upon the comedic hokum style blues of the 1930s. Rush has also recorded a number of strictly blues works as well. While Blind Willie Johnson never recorded a blues, he influenced countless blues musicians with his slide guitar technique. Whether these examples are purely blues or not is less important than the fact that they give a fuller understanding of the individual artists' diverse repertoires and how blues fits into the larger genre of "popular music."

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In order to more fully represent the totality of the blues – its origins and its offspring – the Blues Archive selectively collects examples of musical antecedents to the blues as well as closely related musical styles and direct blues descendents. This includes minstrel song sheet music, recordings of early R&B, books on African American gospel music, and some recordings of string bands and African American fife & drum music. Collecting on the periphery of strict blues is essential to more fully expressing the continuum of influences on and from the blues. While Jimmie Rodgers is widely

known as the “Father of Country Music,” many of the blue yodeler’s lyrics are basically blues in nature; many even use the word “blues” in their titles (e.g. – “Blue Yodel No. 1” and “Train Whistle Blues”). In “I’m a Big Boy Now,” bluesman Big Jack Johnson sings about being influenced by country singers while listening to the radio as a child, which inspired the yodeling he uses in the song. Just as some early jazz songs were influenced by blues harmonies, lyrics, and melodic lines, many blues songs have been influenced by jazz. The same holds true for rock music. Many rock songs are heavily blues based. Likewise, a number of blues songs are rock based. It is difficult to use some formula to determine which of these non-blues examples to include in the Blues Archive. Subjective decisions generally determine which specifically non-blues materials will be added to the Archive. These decisions are based on how closely a particular song is musically, historically, or aesthetically related to the blues. Most of the items that fall into this category come from donations, so the acquisitions budget can be used to fill out the core blues holdings. Also, the fact that the Blues Archive is part of an academic library is helpful in making these decisions. Some of these “gray area” materials can be housed with the music

materials in the main library, freeing the Blues Archive to focus even more specifically on just the blues.

Having become established as a legitimate repository for blues research has made collecting easier, as people want their blues collections to be housed in the Blues Archive. Many collectors contact the Archive each year, wishing to donate materials. Some excellent collections have come to us “out of the blue.” However, we are also the first place many people consider when they clean out their attics and want to get rid of their LP collections. Occasionally, these collections contain materials useful to our needs. More often than not, the LPs are duplicates of records of which we already own two or more copies. The Blues Archive has redirected a number of these collections to either the main library or to other institutions.

Despite the cries of some, the blues is far from dead and is finding new means of expression and new audiences for its older, more traditional sounds. The Blues Archive will be there documenting and preserving these new blues artists and sounds each step of the way.

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## ***International Notes***

This is a new section and Yukihiro Yoshida, who did a guest article earlier this year, provides a new article on the Asian dance scene and connections between that region and the Atlantic

region. Yoshida is now at Keio University. Be aware that some of the web sites listed are partially constructed only.

## The Importance of New Technologies for Asian Dance Documentation Networks

*By Yukihiro Yoshida*

Until recently there have been few dance archives, libraries and museums in Japan. While a Dance Documentation Network has now started, there is no fully developed network of librarians, archivists or curators for this performing art. New developments, however, particularly in the technological realm, are helping the process while at the same time connecting the Japanese scene to the global scene.

Here are some of the linkages that help us span the global dance community:

- The SIBMAS International Directory of Performing Arts Collections and Institutions (<http://www.sibmas.org/>) has opened an Asian resource list and Japanese dance researchers, librarians and archivists have recognized the field “Dance Documentation;” together this provides basic links and basic tools. Also, data format is part of the field of “Dance Documentation.” As computer technologies for data conversion have developed, opening ways to preserve and exchange data, we now have a web-based group for data format on body motion (<http://www.dance-streaming.jp/bodymetrology.html>).
- In the States, the discussion group, “Dance Librarians Discussion Group” (<https://listserv.indiana.edu/archives/dldg-1.html>) has been helpful as a model for the first Japanese dance documentation discussion group (<http://www.dance-streaming.jp/documentation.html>) on which I have volunteered.
- This summer, the New York Public Library started a web-based forum on dance documentation, “eSymposium: Dancing in the Digital Age.” Researchers and librarians in many fields exchanged ideas. From Tokyo, Japan, I submitted ideas on Asian dance documentation.
- For researchers in this field outside of Western countries, “local knowledge” and “technologies” are keywords in research. In the field of dance research, the forms of knowledge in dance are emerging. On this topic look to the “Decentering Dancing Text Project” and look to the following link for the best current information (<http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/8137/01/p108-miles-board.pdf>). And for products which have focused on local knowledge, the “FAQ : Postcoloniality, Transculture, and Dance Performance in Asia Pacific” site (<http://www.dance-streaming.jp/postcolonial.html>) is an important example.

The most recent development has been the use of Internet2. In a project this past September supported by Keio University (<http://www.dance-streaming.jp/Internet2?index.html>) we had a streaming session between the U.S. and Japan. From the U.S., the Japanese contemporary dance



company Leni Basso broadcasted a rehearsal of its work *Rondo*. This is an important new tool in “Dance Documentation” for researchers, librarians, and archivists, and will be used further.

## *News of Roundtable Members*

This is a new section in *Performance!* Please pass along information to let others know of your changes.

Dance archivist **Debra Elfenbein** is now (Summer 2005) with the Dance Notation Bureau in New York City.

Jazz enthusiast **David Keller** is now with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

**Leslie Hansen Kopp**, a charter member of the roundtable, has taken a position with Safe Sound Archive.

Co-chair **Helice Koffler** has passed along the following note: **Madeleine Nichols**, author of an article in the Summer 2005 issue, retired in November after 18 years as Curator of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library. Nichols will continue to serve on fundraising and other special projects but will spend more time on personal interests that include raising Merino sheep.

## *Editor's Corner*

### **The Next Issue**

The Winter-Spring issue will include new **Reports from the Field** and more. Look for the next issue to appear in early April.

Your editor invites members to give suggestions for writers for the new **International Notes** section, for perspectives from other parts of the globe, whether Europe, Latin America, or elsewhere. Who can help?

### **Invitation to Join SAA**

SAA's structure provides for roundtables that meet the needs and interests of small groups within the profession. This allows for both flexibility and linkages for shared interests in more specialized areas. So persons can join a roundtable without a requirement of membership in SAA. Even so, your editor hopes that those of you who are not members will consider membership in SAA. In the editor's view, it will likely prove to be a good deal for both.

## **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 120 people. Following the distribution to the roundtable's membership the issue is turned into a .pdf file for placement on the roundtable's web site.

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