

# PERFORMANCE!



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

**Issue for Summer 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*

### **Before I Pass the Baton**

*By* Bridget Carr

First of all, I hope to see you all in New Orleans at our annual meeting on Thursday, August 18, from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. As my term as Co-chair is winding down, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for giving me the opportunity and privilege of serving during the past three years. It has been an educational and rewarding experience for me and I feel fortunate that I have been able to get to know many performing arts colleagues a little better. We are fortunate that Karen Spicher will be continuing her term as co-chair but I wanted to remind you that at this summer's meeting we will be appointing a new co-chair to serve a two-year term. Karen and I have heard from at least one Roundtable member who is interested in serving as co-chair. It is not too late, however, for you to put your name forward. Please consider volunteering!

In addition to all of you who have submitted articles to *Performance!*, I would like to extend special thanks and gratitude to George Bain and Ashley Yandle for all the contributions they have made to the Performing Arts Roundtable by soliciting and editing articles for *Performance!* and by developing the website. Their dedication and hard work is what sustains the roundtable between our annual meetings.

It has been a privilege to be involved in a leadership capacity with the Performing Arts Roundtable. See you in New Orleans!

**P.S.: Please Join Us For Dinner!!!** Please consider joining us for dinner following the Roundtable meeting. We plan on meeting at the Hurricane Happy Hour in the vendor showcase area at 6:30 and then either walking or grabbing cabs to a local restaurant for a 7:00 reservation. Our speaker Rachel Lyons has agreed to help us select a restaurant so we can all experience the authentic flavor of New Orleans. We will need to make reservations so please e-mail me at [bcarr@bso.org](mailto:bcarr@bso.org) by Friday, August 12, 2005 if you'd like to attend.

## *News Notes*

### **News Items for the New Orleans Conference**

The SAA Performing Arts Roundtable will conduct its annual meeting at the conference in New Orleans on Thursday, August 18 from 4–5:30 p.m. Check the conference information booklet in New Orleans for place.

Following the business meeting there will be a presentation by Rachel Lyons, the archivist with the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Her presentation is entitled "Where y'at?: Collections Development in the Big Easy." Find more details in the Activities Section of the roundtable web site.

### **SAA Conference Sessions Related to the Performing Arts**

At SAA the following sessions offer promise for members of the Performing Arts Roundtable:

**Session 206** – *Archives Unplugged: Exhibits on a Shoestring*, conducted by our roundtable's own Bridget Carr,

**Session 502** -- *All That Jazz: The Role of Academic Repositories in Preserving American Jazz*, and **Session 706** – *Recycled Sound: Using Archival Audio to Recall American Cultures*.

For those who make it to New Orleans, give these sessions extra consideration.

### **NYPL Dance Division Forum**

Members of the Performing Arts Roundtable were sent a message by email in June from former SAA president Peter Hirtle. In his message, Hirtle spoke about his involvement with a process at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Jerome Robbins Dance Division "regarding the most effective way for dance artists and companies to capture and preserve their work, and the feasibility of making these works broadly available to the public." The NYPL, he adds, was opening a phase for wider input through an online Forum in July and early August.

It is to be hoped results from the Forum will be posted. At the same time, roundtable members will garner some sense of the dynamics in play by reading the "Report from the Field" article in this issue of *Performance!* by Madeleine Nichols.

### **Dance Heritage Coalition Publication**

The Dance Heritage Coalition has recently published a report prepared by Media Matters (i.e., Jim Lindner) entitled "Digital Video Preservation Reformatting Project"

[www.danceheritage.org/preservation/DigitalVideoPreservation1.pdf](http://www.danceheritage.org/preservation/DigitalVideoPreservation1.pdf) (2004) with funding from the Andrew Mellon Foundation. Thanks also to Peter Hirtle for this note. "It is," Hirtle adds, "a nice overview of some of the issues in preserving video, and includes some good information on the different video codecs." [Editor's Note: Madeleine Nichols also discusses this publication in her article below.]

### **Alwin Nikolais/Murray Louis Dance Site Opens**

The Mahn Center in the Ohio University Libraries has opened a web site for its Alwin Nikolais/Murray Louis Collection on modern dance. The site

[www.library.ohiou.edu/libinfo/depts/archives/dance/](http://www.library.ohiou.edu/libinfo/depts/archives/dance/) offers an archival collection inventory along with illustrative material that includes streaming media from 16 performances. For more information contact Judy Connick ([connick@ohio.edu](mailto:connick@ohio.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 for archivists in or with the performing arts.

The two reports in this issue offer valuable perspectives from two experienced performing arts archivists. The first of the reports, written by Madeleine M. Nichols, peers into the future by examining where performing arts archivists, in dance especially, have worked together over the last decade or two, and by then asking what large-scale collaborative effort needs to be tackled next. The second report, by Peter Kieffer, speaks more to performing artists themselves—but through the lens of (and the outreach efforts of) a performing arts archivist in charge of a major collection.

### **An Essay about the Future**

*By Madeleine M. Nichols*

The traditional role of a performing arts archive is commonly thought to consist of providing guidance to researchers who visit the specialized collections. Underlying that is collecting, preserving, and making accessible for study and exhibitions the materials of a performing arts archive. Those traditionally have included set and costume designs, photographs, playscripts, music scores, notation scores, sheet music, audio and videotapes, films, phonorecordings, performance and souvenir programs, books, journals, scrapbooks, manuscripts and memorabilia.

Enter the era of Internet access and digitization. Now the old perceptions don't add up to meet the needs of the artists, the performances, or their audiences, including critics and scholars at every level. Fundamentally, the "traditional" role has largely been in the minds of other people, not the curators and archivists and librarians

serving in performing arts archives. Even the "old" basic work of collection development for performing arts awakened awareness that a performance must be documented if it is to be studied later.

#### **I. Value**

The value of the performing arts is what they add to and what they tell us about human cultures. Performances express all manner of complex ideas, relationships and emotions. The arts, and performing arts most intensely, pull people or repel them, like magnets. Cultural historians depict the performing arts as part of the ecology of mankind. And so the documentation relates to something continuous, international, an aspect of world cultural heritage.

#### **II. Community of Practice in Access and Conservation**

In protecting and preserving a national and international cultural heritage, performing

arts repositories and archives bring access and conservation into the process. And in response to the value of the performing arts, that access and conservation is work beyond the scope of any one repository.

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Members of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) are proceeding into a digital future, while also still caring for the paper-based and chemical based documents of the theater, music and dance. Resources inherent in SAA's Performing Arts Roundtable participation include experience with users who vary by age and, geographic location, among other factors. Experience with best practices and the facility to assess and evaluate the impact of the work of access and conservation are additional resources.

Whether we consider a born-digital performance created on-line only, or one that occurred hundreds of years ago, the agenda demanding attention now would define areas for a number of communities of practice to influence the future:

- Share best practices, set standards, and provide training for others;
- Share dilemmas and solutions on metadata and digital capture, storage, preservation, access, and display;
- Explore practicalities of setting priorities, e.g., in resource and time allocations;
- Engage with academics in curricular design;
- Explore digital and non-digital documentation protocols for use by

performers and videographers/technicians to meet the needs of artists and repositories as well.

One example of collaborative work is the Dance Heritage Coalition, a voluntary brain trust of representatives from eight performing arts library/museums/festivals across the United States. It is dedicated to resolving the most difficult areas that stymie progress in the dance field, and have application in all the arts, too. Two illustrations show how such a community of practice can influence the future. One is the shared cataloging guidelines for performing arts materials and processing guidelines for collections of performing arts materials. See, e.g.:

<http://danceheritage.org/cataloguing/image.html>. A shared site for finding aids is just one outcome of that. These sites have immense credibility because so many locations worked together and so many professional organizations reviewed the results and made suggestions for improvements. Another important advance was a test project on converting analog moving image records to digital records without loss of integrity of the information. The test recommended a standard for file format and compression. See:

<http://danceheritage.org/preservation/DigitalVideoPreservation1.pdf>

. The lesson learned from the Coalition experience is that helpful and influential solutions are found by considering the total context of others' needs.

### **III. Dialogs with the Artists**

To best learn the needs of performing artists, might a dialogue among performers and curators propel archives forward in the new era? Would it stimulate the artists to identify their documentation needs? Might it focus on the amount and quality of documentation

in the performing arts to a level where artists routinely preserve their work in a way that can be saved? Might the presenters and funders of performances then include documentation as part of their support for the performing arts fields?

A single example of the impact of such dialogue is the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts on-line publication *The Collaborative Editing Project to Document Dance*. See:

<http://www.nypl.org/research/lpa/dan/collaborative.pdf>. The voices of choreographers were the impetus for the report, which serves to stimulate the quality of documents and the variety of useful approaches for artists and archives. A more recent study by the Library for the Performing Arts is a Dance Needs Analysis, still in process. News of the findings will be released before the end of 2005, underscoring the needs of artists and the role of archives in the digital future.

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To engage artists, and other users of performing arts archives, in ongoing feedback loops will be a new way of working. A library or museum is a place to meet, or to pursue solitary study, too, as it was in the 20th century. In the 21st century, a library or museum no longer has walls, to the extent that e-mail and fax and telephone carry requests and the Internet provides details about the holdings. At least if something is published, it can be obtained from commercial sources or other locations,

all aided by the Internet in finding what and where items are. Now, adding the feature of an on-going conversation with artists opens a new connection with perhaps the most important resource of all – the artist.

**IV. Next!**

SAA’s Performing Arts Roundtable is an advanced guard for libraries and museums. Its members value knowledge and consider performing arts archives to be essential in the fabric of the world. Do you think we could try implementing some consensus standards and then share results with one another? Could we do it on a schedule or as a regular practice? Do you think we could identify and describe needs many of us have in our work? Do you think we could identify and describe resources we have among us? If we identify an “unsolvable” problem and work to find one or more solutions that will be helpful, then progress is inevitable.

If the biggest problem for performing arts archivists is the wide range of formats, like clippings, programs, posters, and varied media—all non-book materials—then concerted action on finding out what actual practices in digital “baby steps” are helping to at least find the materials (if not preserve and make them accessible in newer or better ways) would be a high priority survey. A welcome by-product of such an investigation would be learning who is willing to take a little time to share problems, successes, disappointments and efficiencies in the course of daily work. Just to have a sizeable group of archival professionals describe the problems that recur in the course of daily work would be an important step to finding common solutions. Even in the context of the traditional paper and media formats, my first question would be: What born-digital performing “collection” is already in a member’s care and how is it handled? How

does it relate to the other performing arts materials at that location?

*Madeleine M. Nichols* ([mnichols@nypl.org](mailto:mnichols@nypl.org)) is Curator of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York City.

## Don't Forget the Archives

By Peter T. Kiefer

Every organization, of any kind creates and collects files, paper and artifacts as the group moves through time. At first it is saved for review in succeeding years to check how things were previously done. Eventually this material gets moved farther back in the files, cabinets, closets, or boxes. Sometime, all too often, someone will go through and determine that this stuff isn't needed anymore and throws it out. Maybe, if you're lucky it only gets moved farther out of reach but still exists.

As time goes on these archival materials take on a different but no less important value. They are about the history of the organization. In our business that organization can be an orchestra, a ballet company, a choral group, a singer or instrumentalist, chamber group, an auditorium, foundation, etc. As time goes on history becomes important to the foundation of this organization.

So how do we take care of all the stuff our group generates? Very carefully! Preservation experts can tell you about replacing metal paper clips and staples with plastic ones, putting the paper in non-acidic folders and envelopes, storing recordings in proper containers, keeping the storage environment cool and steady of temperature

and humidity. Of course now you are busy carrying on the business of this bustling organization and doing the above can always be done later. That's true but there are some things you can do as you are working.

I am the archivist for the entire belongings of Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians and after spending a thirty-year association working with Waring, I now have spent a twenty-year period working on his archives. We have everything concerning his 67 years as one of the top showmen in entertainment history. So to you who are in the process of building a long lasting organization there are some things you can do as you go.

Most important, **date everything!** Letters and contracts usually do carry dates, but not always memos, notes to people, thank-you's from people, often noted ones. Newspaper articles that are clipped should either carry the date from the paper or have it penciled on it.

Magazines often hide the dates; write it on the cover if not already there or prominent enough and then mark the page of the article of interest. Copies of publicity pieces written must have the complete date written on them.

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**So how do we take care of all the stuff our group generates? Very carefully!**

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Program books too often have the day's date but not the year! And be sure the location of the event is noted. I have found too many "Concert at the Convention of Good Cooks, January 27, 2003" but (ten years later) where was it?

Photographs are the most neglected as to identification. I'm sure you think you will always remember the occasion, location, date and the names of the people in it. But five years later five will get you ten you won't remember some vital information about that photo. Either clip a paper to the photo with the information, put it in a separate envelope or a file for the same event in an envelope with the information written on the envelope, or make a photocopy of the photo and put the pertinent information on it and attach to the original. Another method—much less preferred—is to write on the back of the photo the date, location and the names of persons in it. If you do this, use a soft lead pencil or a rapidograph pen, and write on the edges, as impressions may come through the paper later.

Recordings of concerts, events etc, like-wise need information with them telling such things as the type of media used, speeds, and other technical information; a list of what is contained on the recording and, of course, dates and locations. Again, these recordings must be stored very carefully so they aren't damaged or abused.

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**The most unusual items that came to Penn State in the collection were two automobiles that belonged to Mr. Waring...**

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Any musical organization and musical artist will accumulate a music library. The larger it gets the harder it will be to keep track of. Decide early how you want to store the music and in what kind of order.

Alphabetically by title is the most logical. Some artists like to store it by the type of music; secular, religious, folk, popular, love songs, novelty songs, etc. Fred Waring had eight separate categories under which he stored his choral arrangements and he numbered each one as they were created and added. It didn't take me long to figure out they all needed to be alphabetically in order together.

You can and should make a computer listing of all the music that includes, besides the title, names of the composers, arrangers, publishers, and copyright date. You also can code them for a particular style or category and the computer can sort them to your desire. The music should be stored in some sort of folder or box that will keep it from being damaged. Open shelves are good, file cabinets often nick the edges of the music.

Music that is in bad shape, especially sheet music, should be placed in archival or non-PVC-polypropylene folders.

When it is decided to move files and records to storage, put them in boxes and in chronological order with the boxes plainly marked as to the contents and the date period. You can put financial records and correspondence in separate boxes as well as concert programs, publicity material, etc.

For your information the Fred Waring Collection consists of 67 years of office records and correspondence, 33, 500 photographs, 25, 000 recordings on 78 rpm discs, 16 inch transcriptions, 300 reels of wire recording, 259 audio cassettes and 700

reels of tape on all sizes of reels. Also 75 scrapbooks, various show and leisure sport coats, megaphones, old instruments, costumes, props, hundreds of trophies, awards, and citations, various artifacts and a collection of 600 pieces of original cartoon art on various sized media all done by some of the most outstanding cartoon artists of the 20th century. And within the files we found over 600 letters from well-known celebrities of his era.

The most unusual items that came to Penn State in the collection were two automobiles that belonged to Mr. Waring; a 1965 Cadillac Limousine and a 1955 BMW-Isetta.

While they were fun to have, it was decided that they really didn't have anything to do with Fred Waring's contribution to American choral music so they were photographed and then, much to my relief, auctioned off by the University with the proceeds going into the Waring Endowment Fund.

Archives can be instructive and educational for those who come later to see how your organization was born, grew, existed and hopefully, continued.

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

### **Our Roundtable—How Far Can We Go Together?**

It is a commonplace that one will never reach a star if one does not make the attempt. This said, SAA President Randall Jimerson in his outgoing *Archival Outlook* presidential message has issued a strong call for archivists to become advocates for our profession. And SAA Council, the most recent issue of *Archival Outlook* reports, is working diligently on new strategic priorities—and seeking input from members of SAA.

In light of this new discussion, and given the bully pulpit of this roundtable newsletter, your editor poses a question for archivists in the Performing Arts arena: Should we be reaching for a star together? If so, what star?

My personal quest would be that anyone--beginning performing artists especially--going to the homepage of the Opera America or the Country Music Association web site would find a direct link to information on what is involved with organizing, documenting and preserving the aspiring artist or group's performance from the get-go.

Is this a worthy goal? Or is it a mere pipe dream? You may disagree. It is to be hoped you have another star that is imminently more reachable. Fine and good. (Please note that Madeleine

Nichols is setting her sights on a star that will require a collaborative effort.) So if you are in New Orleans and want to talk this over, let us sit down and do so—and then involve others. If you cannot attend but have something to say, use email. Who knows, maybe no one will speak out. (Are performing arts archivists all Norwegian bachelor farmers from Minnesota in disguise?) Then again, if members agree that the roundtable needs priorities that are not currently set down, this will rise to the surface. If you do, speak out—and if others join you—then these statements can be part of the next issue of *Performance!* What say?

### **Articles in the Next Issue**

The Fall issue will include a report on the roundtable's annual business meeting, new **Reports from the Field** and more. Look for the next issue to appear in late November or early December.

If you have an article proposal, please write or call. If you have ideas for new features, etc., bring these up at the meeting in New Orleans. If you have suggestions about topics, please make them.

### **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 100 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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