

PERFORMANCE!



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

Issue for Fall 2007 - Winter 2008

[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)]

Visit the Roundtable Web Site: www.archivists.org/saagroups/performart/

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Roundtable Leadership – Co-Chairs:

(2008):

Adriana Cuervo
Sousa Archives/Center for American Music
236 Harding Band Building
University of Illinois
Champaign, IL 61820
217-244-9309
acuervo@uiuc.edu

(2009):

Susan Brady
Archivist
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Yale University
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
203-432-9038
susan.brady@yale.edu

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Roundtable Leadership (continued)

Steering Committee Members:

Scott Schwartz (2008)
Sousa Archives/Center for American Music
236 Harding Band Building
University of Illinois
Champaign, IL 61820
217-333-4577
schwartzs@uiuc.edu

Andy Wentink (2009)
Curator of Special Collections & Archives
Middlebury College Library
Middlebury, VT 05753
802-443-5501
awentink@middlebury.edu

Newsletter Editor:

George Bain
110 Columbia Avenue
Athens, OH 45701
740-592-3828
bain@ohio.edu

Web Master:

Helice Koffler (*until February 25*)
Wilson Processing Project
New York Public Library
New York, NY 10036-4396
212-714-8527
hkoffler@nypl.org

Message from the Roundtable Co-Chair

What do YOU want for the Performing Arts Roundtable?

By **Adriana Cuervo**

The beginning of a new year always brings forth many expectations within a mind frame of rebirth and renewal. I want to take the opportunity and the spirit of the season to share with you a couple of thoughts regarding what we do and where we want to go as a group in the next few years. I want to invite all our membership to join the conversation and help define our mission and our future within SAA and the profession. Our current mission statement reads “The Performing Arts Roundtable encourages the exchange of information on historical and contemporary documentation of music, dance, theater, and other performing media.” In our last meeting we voiced our intention to take a closer look at ourselves as performance arts archivists and reshape our mission statement to reflect who we are today, and, most importantly, who we want to be in the future.

What is your vision of the Performing Arts Roundtable? What direction should the roundtable take in the next few years? I see a group of passionate and committed professionals who manage and set the standards of archival practice within performing arts collections. This year we elected a two-member steering committee to start working on, among other things, our mission statement and on increasing our visibility and impact within the organization. I am thrilled to report that the steering committee, Scott Schwartz and Andrew Wentink, successfully submitted a session proposal for the next annual meeting titled “Getting to the Heart of Performance:

Archivists as Creative Collaborators” where two leading dance and jazz performers will demonstrate how to return voice to the art contained in our collections of papers and audio-visual recordings through preservation in action. The roundtable also sponsored a session proposal titled “The Future of the Present: Preserving Avant-Garde Art” which focuses on four different initiatives to identify and preserve collections of live, new media, and other ephemeral art, which was also accepted by the program committee. We literally hit the ground running!

We have outgrown our initial intention of exchanging information on documentation strategies for performance media. As active professionals that collaborate with artists and other allied professions to keep the performing aspect of our collections from falling into oblivion, we should take our activities beyond the annual meeting. I know that we are all involved in fascinating projects that feed into what we want the roundtable to become. Helice Koffler, past co-chair and now web master, has been steadily blogging about archives-related issues in the performing arts at <http://ephemeralarchives.wordpress.com>. I know she will be thrilled to hear from our membership in her posts. We should also position ourselves within the broader professional context, and find common ground with other professional organizations such as the Association for Recorded Sound Collections, the Music Library Association, or the Theatre Library Association to name a few.

We want your feedback, and I will now take this conversation to our listserv where we can continue to shape the future of our roundtable. I would like to close my message by thanking George Bain for his patience and commitment to the roundtable, Andrew Wentink and Scott Schwartz for their hard work on the session proposal, and Susan Brady for her enthusiasm and persistence. I would also like to thank Ashley Yandle, our former webmaster, for her hard work on keeping our Web site updated, and now Helice Koffler, former co-chair and new webmaster, for taking on this responsibility. My term will end at the end of this annual meeting, so it is never too early to consider serving as the co-chair for the term 2009-2011. You’ll be working with an excellent group of archivists!

Society of American Archivists Performing Arts Roundtable Annual Meeting Report

The Society of American Archivists’ Performing Arts Roundtable conducted its annual meeting on Wednesday, August 29, 2007. The round table met in the Special Collections area of the Harold Washington Library Center of the Chicago Public Library in downtown Chicago. More than 25 people were in attendance.

Co-chair Adriana Cuervo (2008) called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. She made a few remarks about the agenda for the meeting then introduced the other co-chair, Helice Koffler (2007). They asked for the others to introduce themselves. Newsletter editor George Bain, who had volunteered to write the report of the meeting, asked those attending to sign a sheet being passed around. Su Kim Chung, who is on the program committee for the 2008 meeting in San

Francisco, briefly reviewed the theme and formats and encouraged members to submit session proposals.

The co-chairs noted that Susan Brady had volunteered to step into the co-chair term for 2007-2009 and proposed her for the position. With no nominations from the floor, the members approved Brady as the new co-chair. Koffler next proposed changes in the structure of governance for the roundtable. She and Cuervo stated goals for the coming year include submitting a workshop or session proposal for the 2008 meeting; revising the roundtable's mission statement, pointing toward a role of more advocacy; and expanding the steering committee to help the roundtable become more active. The proposal met with approval, and Andy Wentink (two year term) and Scott Schwartz (one year term) volunteered to serve on the expanded steering committee. Koffler has volunteered to become the webmaster; she hopes to expand this platform with Web 2.0 features, such as a blog or a Wiki, and have this complement the newsletter as instruments for communication. Cuervo called for collaboration with allied organizations, pointing to the Music Library Association as a model for the roundtable.

Before moving into the program part of the meeting, the co-chairs asked for announcements and general comments. Peter Brothers invited members to attend his session on the following afternoon. Cuervo noted that she would be distributing a survey soon on [get info on this]. Scott Schwartz suggested that SAA be encouraged to feature performing artists more directly into the conference program, and this led to a brief discussion with which the members expressed general agreement.

With the business meeting done at approximately 4:50 p.m., Cuervo introduced Bob Sloane, Head of the Art Information Center of the Chicago Public Library, who gave a presentation "Chicago Plays a Part in Dance History." He illustrated the breadth of collections and the collecting efforts of CPL in this realm with images and clips. Following his presentation, his colleagues gave a brief tour to interested members of the Chicago Dance Archives, the Chicago Artists' Archives, the Chicago Blues Archives, and the Chicago Theater Archive, all located on the 8th and 9th floors of the Harold Washington Center.

Reported by George Bain

News Notes

ARL Anniversary Publication Celebrates Several Performing Arts Collections

As part of its 75th anniversary celebration, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has published a book entitled *Celebrating Research: Rare and Special Collections from the Membership of the Association of Research Libraries* (2007). The publication, which is also viewable online at www.celebratingresearch.org, identifies an exemplary collection at each member's institution. And performing arts collections are featured for the following libraries: Johns Hopkins (Levy sheet music collection), Ohio University (Nikolais-Louis dance collection),

Rutgers University (jazz oral history collection), Vanderbilt University (20th Century French theater collection), and the University of Western Ontario (Gustav Mahler-Alfred Rosé collection).

Important Notice: Sign up for the New Newsletter Distribution System

Beginning with the next issue of *Performance!* there will be a new system for distributing the roundtable's newsletter. To receive it and subsequent issues members you will need to register for roundtable membership through SAA.

Those who are members of SAA but who have not yet updated their membership profile need to do so by contacting Membership Services membership@archivists.org and including the Performing Arts Roundtable as one of your two choices of roundtables. (Do note that current SAA policy limits Roundtable Steering Committee membership to SAA members only.)

Persons who are not members of SAA can still be members of the roundtable. To do this, you will need to visit the SAA Web site www.archivists.org/ and subscribe to membership in the roundtable. The pathway to this is not fully clear at the moment, however, but there will be changes to the Web site in coming weeks. If you encounter problems after the first of March, please be in touch with your editor for assistance.

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 looks at the basic conservation considerations needed for a music collection, with a focus on the Chicago Public Library's Music Information Center. Christopher Popa discusses the procedures his department uses within the operative framework of providing care for the collection—even to a principal of not accepting materials with mold or mildew.

Editor's note: See also the separate note on p. X where Popa asks for interaction on judging the attributes of certain pieces of music. We hope you enjoy this diversion from the usual content.

Filthy Phonograph Records and Some XXXtra Safe Methods to Clean Them

By Christopher Popa

In a couple of different ways, sound recordings can be dirty or filthy or filthy dirty. Depending on your viewpoint, “dirty” might refer to, say, Madonna’s single, *Like a Virgin* (“...touched for the very first time...”); “filthy” may be an album with George Carlin’s comedy routine, *Seven Words You Can Never Say On Television*; but “filthy dirty” could be an LP including Mahalia Jackson singing *It Is No Secret (What God Can Do)* - if it has dust or dirt on it.

Sometimes, at the Music Information Center of Chicago Public Library, where I work, we get a box of donations that are filthy dirty, and I’m not referring to their lyrics or subject matter (or lack thereof). Thankfully, if it is something that is desirable to retain for the collection, cleaning filthy dirty records (whether 33, 45, or 78 rpm) can be easy.

Our staff routinely uses the Discwasher Record Care System, basically their cleaning solution and brush pad. A few drops of the fluid are applied on the leading edge of the brush pad, then the pad is gently circulated around the record, in the direction of the grooves. There should be enough fluid on the brush pad to provide a small puddle in front of the moving brush. (If you want to, place the disc on a turntable and give it a spin, or let the unit’s motor rotate it while you hold the pad against the record.) Afterwards, we then place the record on a VPI HW-16 Record Cleaner, a rotating (non-playable) turntable that vacuums away any extra moisture.

I have heard it said that even brand-new, still-sealed records, which occasionally are given to us (and which you think would be clean), may have mold release compounds in their grooves, thus requiring cleaning.

I would advise against keeping for your library or yourself records with any sort of mold or mildew, regardless of their musical, historical, or monetary value.

What does your budget allow? Products to clean records range from under \$25 to over \$2500. There are simple, commercial cleaning brushes and solutions from, for example, Discwasher, Disc Doctor, and Pfanstiehl; inexpensive record cleaning machines by Spin-Clean and KAB; and professional-quality units, like those from Nitty Gritty, VPI Industries, and Loricraft.

Examples of Online Vendors:

Acoustic Sounds, Inc.,

<http://store.acousticsounds.com>

Disc Doctor, The, www.discdoc.com

KAB, www.kabusa.com

Loricraft Audio,

www.smartdev.com/loricraft.html

Nitty Gritty, Inc., www.nittygrittyinc.com

VP Industries, Inc.,

www.vpiindustries.com

For example, according to The Disc Doctor's website, their products are used by, among others, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound at The New York Public Library and The Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University.

There are other simple methods to safely and effectively clean records, but these would not be suitable for large quantities - more what a private collector might try on a single, prized record for home (personal) use. Cleaning methods vary somewhat depending on the composition of the disc. Generally, begin with nondestructive, dry methods, such as gentle dusting, vacuuming, and antistatic brushing. If that does not work, use nondestructive cleaning solutions, such as deionized (distilled) water or a diluted amount of denatured alcohol. Be sure to allow enough time for the record to air dry completely on its own, otherwise you will get mold spots or statically-charge the cleaned surface. It may take up to 60 minutes, depending on room humidity and airflow.

It was in 1914 that...a group of music critics from one of the local newspapers chose items for the collection...

Speaking of mold, I would advise against keeping for your library or yourself records with any sort of mold or mildew, regardless of their musical, historical, or monetary value. A few years ago, we received a gift which included rare jazz recordings by King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, and Franz Jackson (each of whom had a Chicago connection), but there was a musty

“basement” smell to them. It broke my heart to have to get rid of them.

The Music Information Center is lucky that people are often giving us old records – whether clean, dirty, filthy, or filthy dirty. That is fortunate because we like to offer a wide variety of music genres, on everything from 78, 45, and 33 rpm discs to CDs and DAT tapes.

Sometimes, these donations are major treasures, like the day when we received 63,000 singles that came from a bankrupt jukebox distributor. (We saved one copy of each and got rid of the duplicates for 25 cents each at a Library fundraiser.) Or the 8,000 albums given to us by Chicago broadcast station WLS, when they converted storage space into offices and wanted to be rid of their production music library. From Michigan appliance salesman Arnold Jacobsen came his personal, eclectic collection of 40,000 discs, tracing pop music from 1900-1960 but also including historical, political, sports, and other spoken word recordings. Happily, there were no major cleaning issues with these donations.

It was in 1914 that the Music Information Center was started as a separate entity within Chicago Public Library. Back then, a group of music critics from one of the local newspapers chose items for the collection, hoping to elevate the public's taste and avoid “smutty” songs. Suffice it to say that among our present Music Information Center holdings, numbering over 150,000 sound recordings, there are lots of dirty and filthy songs, but, hopefully, no filthy dirty discs – not after we're through cleaning them.

Christopher Popa cpopa@chicagopubliclibrary.org is head of the Music Information Center at the Chicago Public Library. Popa and his colleague sin dance and theater graciously opened up their center for roundtable members attending the annual business meeting at the Harold Washington Library in downtown Chicago.

Special Feature

Are These Records Dirty, Filthy, Or Clean?

Contributor Christopher Popa asks the question: Are the contents of the following titles “dirty,” “filthy,” or “clean”? Submit your comments directly to him cpopa@chicagopubliclibrary.org and, with sufficient response, he will report the consensus in the next issue of the newsletter.

Slippin' and Slidin' (Peepin' and Hidin') – Little Richard (Specialty 572, 1956)
Why Don't We Do It in the Road – The Beatles (Apple 101, 1968)
Touch Me – The Doors (Elektra 45646, 1968)
See Me, Feel Me – The Who (Decca 32729, 1970)
Rock Me Gently – Andy Kim (Capitol 3895, 1974)
Love to Love You Baby – Donna Summer (Oasis 401, 1975)
Tonight's the Night (Gonna Be Alright) – Rod Stewart (Warner 8262, 1976)
It's Ecstasy When You Lay Down Next to Me – Barry White (20th Century 3250, 1977)
Do That to Me One More Time – Captain & Tennille (Casablanca 2215, 1979)
Push It – Salt-n-Pepa (Next Plateau 315, 1987)
Boom, Boom, Boom (Let's Go Back to My Room) – Paul Lekakis (ZYG 1266, 1987)

News of Roundtable Members and Associates

Immediate past co-chair **Helice Koffler** will be moving to the University of Washington as of late February. Her new e-mail address will be hkoffler@u.washington.edu.

George Bain, editor of *Performance!* retired last July 31st as Head of the Robert E. and Jean R. Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections in the Ohio University Libraries.

Editor's Corner

Please Note the New Distribution System Coming with the Next Issue

As indicated in the **News Notes** section, there will be a new system for distributing *Performance!* beginning with the next issue. In order to be on the list, please use the information there to get signed up as a member of the SAA Performing Arts Roundtable. As of mid-January there are less than 50 people who have registered as members of this roundtable.

The Next Issue

The spring issue should as usual include a new **Reports from the Field** article or two and other regular features. Look for the next issue to appear in 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 Editor. The distribution figure is more than 140 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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