

PERFORMANCE!



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

Issue for Winter-Spring 2007

[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 Co-Chair

Gazing into our future

By Adriana Cuervo

I can't believe we're getting ready for another annual meeting! It seems like it was yesterday when we found ourselves in 100+ degree weather in Washington D.C. This year's meeting will take place very close to Labor Day weekend, from August 29 to September 1, at the Fairmont Hotel in Chicago. Early bird registration goes until June 29 and you can register online at <http://www.archivists.org/conference/chicago2007/index.asp>. I am looking forward to catching up with my colleagues and discussing the intricacies of managing performing arts archival collections.

The annual meeting promises to be a busy one for our roundtable given Chicago's rich performing arts heritage. The local arrangements committee has planned quite a spread of tours and open houses that speak to our common interests. There will be a chance to visit the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College, The Rosenthal Archives of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which has recently renewed its space, and the Chicago Jazz Archive at the University of Chicago. If that's not enough to get you to come to the meeting, there are also tours of Roosevelt University's Performing Arts Collection and the Ann Barzel Dance Research Collection at the Newberry Library. For more information on these and other tours, please visit <http://www.archivists.org/conference/chicago2007/chicago2007Tours.asp>. The meeting also coincides with the Chicago Jazz Festival, held just a few blocks south of our meeting site at Grant Park, so we'll have plenty to do when not attending program sessions.

Getting back to business, we will be having our meeting on Wednesday August 29th from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Fairmont Hotel. We are currently working on this year's program, and it would be great to hear what our membership has been up to in the past few months. Please let us know if you want to report on that special project that you just finished, or if you have reached a milestone in your work that can serve as a learning opportunity to our members. Look for details in the next issue of our newsletter, so stay tuned!

I'd like to close this message with a heartfelt thanks to George Bain, who maintains our mailing list and has done an outstanding job editing the newsletter. I would also like to thank Helice Koffler, our senior Co-chair, who has been extremely helpful and has been a pleasure to work with during the past few months. We are looking for a Co-chair to fill in for Helice, whose term ends at the Annual Meeting. This is a great opportunity to get involved in SAA and promote that special feeling about managing performing arts collections that makes you sing and dance. Please let Helice or myself know if you're interested, or if you have someone you'd like to nominate.

News Notes

Award for the Wilson Project at the NYPL

Kit Messick and **Brad Campbell**, Archivists of the Wilson Processing Project at the New York Public Library, received the Second Place Award from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC) for their finding aid for the Paddy Chayefsky Papers, funded through The NEH and Robert W. Wilson. For further information, go to the NYPL [website](#).

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 is a reflective statement on the expectations performing arts professionals today must meet in order to be effective in a more complex job environment today. Professor Francesca Marini delivered a longer version of this article as a paper at the 26th SIBMAS Congress, Vienna, August-September 2006, with the title "The Identity of the Profession: Representing Ourselves to Funding Agencies and the Public."

Performing Arts Information Professionals Today

By Francesca Marini

Since the performing arts are always evolving, the spirit of our community is very modern and in synch with the times. Performing arts information professionals are used to working together across disciplines and professions, care about the users, are close to the creators, know how to work with different kinds of materials, and are usually techno-savvy. All of these qualities are highly sought after in today's information world. But maybe not everybody out there knows this about us and we have to work on achieving better

visibility, both within the information professionals community and outside. We need to clearly articulate what we are and what we do, and why our expertise is so modern and up-to-date.

What is going on in the current world of the information professions? Nowadays, there is a push towards an increased collaboration among archivists, records managers, librarians, museum curators, and information technology specialists. Professions that were once related, but quite

separate from each other, are now re-thinking their identities. They are looking for more opportunities to work together, but without compromising their core principles: collaboration, in fact, should not mean uniformity. A great deal of debate is going on in our communities. For example, last June, one of the plenary sessions of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) 31st Annual Conference, which focused on “The Place of Archives in the Heritage and Cultural Community,”¹ was titled “The New Heritage/Information Professional: What Does this Person Look Like?”. The conference theme of this year’s Association of Canadian Archivists conference is “As Others See Us: Archivists and Society.”² It is important to reflect on issues of identity, especially since many governmental bodies are nowadays moving heritage, cultural, and artistic institutions together, in regard to administrative status and, often, physical location. In St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Provincial Museum, the Provincial Art Gallery and the Provincial Archives were recently united under one roof in a new site, called The Rooms. In the conference session discussed above, Greg Walsh, from the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, described the outcomes of this move, pointing out the importance of centralized access for the public, the increased number of interactive activities and of collections now on display, and the increased sense of cohesion and involvement for the staff, which needs to be open-minded and willing to interact with

¹ See the program of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) 31st Annual Conference: “Living on the Edge-The Place of Archives in the Heritage and Cultural Community;” St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, June 28-July 1, 2006. The ACA Web site is available at <http://archivists.ca/home/> (last accessed: March 26, 2007).

² See the Association of Canadian Archivists Web site at <http://archivists.ca/conference/> (last accessed: March 26, 2007).

colleagues and the public. Local experiences such as the one in Newfoundland and Labrador are mirrored by changes at the national level. The year 2004 saw the creation of Library and Archives Canada (LAC),³ which combines the collections, services and staff expertise of the former National Library of Canada and National Archives of Canada.⁴

While information professionals were in the past often seen as “gatekeepers,” nowadays they are mostly seen as “enablers” and “facilitators.”

It is too early to assess the full impact of these types of new initiatives, but there is no doubt that they represent the direction in which many countries will keep moving in the near future. What was mostly a theoretical debate in recent years is increasingly becoming a practical reality.

The whole issue of our identity and roles may be looked at from several angles. In this article I would like to briefly discuss the following: in this time of re-assessment of the information professions, where do performing arts information professionals stand and what strengths do they already have that match current demands?

In general—and simplified—terms, based on the Canadian examples that I mentioned earlier and on the experience of many

³ Library and Archives Canada (LAC)/Bibliothèque and Archives Canada (BAC). Web site at <http://www.lac-bac.ca>; last accessed: March 26, 2007.

⁴ See Library and Archives Canada, “About Us” (available at: <http://www.lac-bac.ca/about-us/index-e.html>); last accessed: March 26, 2007).

practitioners, there are several issues that seem to be at the forefront of today's practice:

1) *Collaboration*: Practitioners from different communities are increasingly expected to work together, sharing their knowledge, expertise and points of view. To work in isolation within one's own domain is becoming less and less accepted.

2) *Easy Access, Outreach, and Education*: Even more than in the past, institutions are expected to provide the public with effective and timely access to all collections and fonds, both on-site and through the Internet. The public's familiarity with the Internet and with electronic mail has created the expectation of quick replies and uncomplicated access to information and to copies of materials; centralized access is very important. While information professionals were in the past often seen as "gatekeepers," nowadays they are mostly seen as "enablers" and "facilitators."

3) *Managing Dynamic Information*: In a world where information co-exists in hundreds of different physical and conceptual formats created through time, information professionals need to have enough flexibility and knowledge to manage different types of materials, many of them dynamic and non-fixed. This skill is particularly relevant in the electronic environment, since the understanding of dynamic and diverse materials helps in the management of ever-changing electronic sources.

4) *Knowledge of Technology*: Nowadays, technology is a big part of the information professionals' work. It has introduced new tools, but it has also created new types of sources and new issues to deal with. These sources need to be managed, and traditional

rules do not always apply. They also need to be preserved, a difficult task that is being tackled locally by single institutions, as well as by digital preservation initiatives worldwide. Records related to performance are being examined in the context of major archival research projects, such as InterPARES 2, in which much has been learned from the analysis of the performing arts.⁵

5) *Preserving Continuing Cultural, Social, and Political Memory in Accessible Form*: The core task of the information professions has not changed, but preserving heritage nowadays also means using the existing memory to create new active knowledge. Furthermore, information professionals are starting to be seen as players in the collaborative creation of sources, and not just as passive receivers and custodians.

We generally have strong technical skills and have embraced all kinds of new technologies.

I am sure that the performing arts information professionals reading this article are thinking "I have been doing this for a long time in my repository and in my practice." This is exactly where our strengths lie. The characteristics of the performing arts and of the sources related to them naturally lead us to do things in a specific way. It is a way that was maybe alien to mainstream information

⁵ InterPARES (International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems) 2; project's Web site at www.interpares.org (last accessed: March 26, 2007). See also Luciana Duranti and Kenneth Thibodeau, "The Concept of Record in Interactive, Experiential and Dynamic Environments: The View of InterPARES," *Archival Science* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 13-38.

professionals in the past, but happens to be cutting-edge nowadays. As we can see in associations like the International Association of Libraries and Museums of the Performing Arts (SIBMAS) or the Theatre Library Association (TLA), and in groups like SAA's Performing Arts Roundtable, we are driven and united by the interest in the performing arts and, although we may have different specializations, we never had a problem communicating with each other and working together, as archivists, librarians, museum curators, scholars and educators. We all understand what needs to be done to document and preserve the performing arts and we see the different specializations as ways to deal with different aspects of the materials that we manage. Thinking about all the people that I have met, I can say that we wear many hats and some of us work in situations in which library, archival, and museum skills may be required at the same time. Even when we work within just one specialization and identify ourselves with just one profession, we still understand each other's points of view. The different types of repositories we work in are often mixed environments where, for example, archival and library collections are housed, and at times managed, together. We are definitely not new to the idea of centralized access and have, on the contrary, pursued it for a long time. We generally have strong technical

skills and have embraced all kinds of new technologies. Since in many instances we deal with materials that are never really fixed, we truly understand dynamic information and we therefore have no problems in fully grasping the potential of the online environment. We are close to the performing arts reality (both in its artistic and administrative dimensions) and to the creators, and many of us are or have been involved first person as performers or directors. We are proactive in seeking and helping create sources, and we really want them to be used by artists in their work, by the general public for their own knowledge and entertainment, and by scholars in their research, just to make a few examples. We are truly interested in users and in facilitating access, dialogue and interactivity. We care about outreach, and about art, society and politics, and are often involved, directly or indirectly, in supporting change. Some of us are engaged in soliciting and promoting legislation, too.

We are an international group that shows cohesion, support, knowledge and reciprocal respect. In the context of the larger visibility problem that affects the information professions, we need to promote our strengths and use our identity to explain our work to those who are not aware of what we do.

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News of Roundtable Members and Associates

For this section in *Performance!* please pass along information to let others know of your changes.

Dr. **Francesca Marini** has been invited for a month-long (April 21-May 21 2007) fellowship at the University of Glasgow, as Honorary Research Fellow and Arts and Humanities Data Service-Performing Arts Visiting Fellow. Her work will be linked to the activities of the Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS)-Performing Arts, of the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII), and of the Digital Curation Centre (DCC). She will also run a seminar on her research as part of the Digital Curation Centre Seminar Programme, on the topics of documenting the performing arts and managing performing arts archives.

Information from the most recent issue of the NYPL Staff Newsletter: **Don McCormick**, a 43-year veteran of the New York Public Library who headed the Rodgers and Hammerstein Division of Recorded Sound for 23 years, retired on March 30. On April 1, **Sara Velez**, the former Assistant Curator of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Division, became the Curator of the Archives.

Editor's Corner

Who Has Photographic Images to Share?

The Roundtable's web site continues with photographic images from the North Carolina State Archives. But web master Ashley Yandle asked at the outset for others to share images from collections. Do you have images to share, to increase the prominence of your collections? If so, contact Yandle at ashley.yandle@ncmail.net.

The Next Issue

The Summer issue should include a new **Reports from the Field** article or two and other regular features. Look for the next issue to appear in July.

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 just over 125 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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