

PERFORMANCE!



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

Issue for Spring - Summer 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 (continued)

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Message from the Roundtable Co-Chair

San Francisco, Here We Come!

By Susan Brady

Soon we will be heading to the West Coast to attend the 2008 annual meeting. I am very happy to announce that our Roundtable meeting will be hosted by Kirsten Tanaka, head librarian and archivist at the Museum of Performance & Design (formerly the San Francisco Performance Arts Library and Museum) on Wednesday, August 27, from 1:00-3:00 p.m. (see additional information in this issue). Following our business meeting Kirsten will talk about the institution and its evolution from the San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum to the Museum of Performance & Design and the plans to build a new facility. She will follow her talk with a tour highlighting materials from the wonderful collections of the Museum's Performing Arts Library. Joe Evans, archivist of the San Francisco Symphony, will also join us to talk about the establishment of the Symphony's new archive and their future development plans.

During our business meeting we will continue the discussion from last year's meeting regarding the direction we want the Roundtable to take. One of the recommendations that Adriana Cuervo has put forward is that we as Roundtable members take our activities beyond the annual meeting. Additionally, she suggested that we find ways to work with professional organizations with which we share common interests. I'd like to propose one project that would address both of these recommendations. For a number of years I have had conversations with other performing arts archivists about the lack of appropriate standardized form and genre terms for materials documenting scenic, lighting and costume design. I propose that the Roundtable coordinate an effort with members of other organizations to identify and contribute terms to the standard

thesauri. While some repositories have developed their own in-house descriptors, a coordinated effort would result in standard terminology that could be used throughout the profession. I look forward to discussing this and other suggestions you may have for extending our Roundtable activities.

Two very exciting conference sessions (which were endorsed by the Roundtable) will be of particular interest. As my co-chair Adriana Cuervo mentioned in the last issue of *Performance!*, our steering committee members, Scott Schwartz and Andrew Wentink submitted a session proposal that was accepted for the next annual meeting. "Getting to the Heart of Performance: Archivists as Creative Collaborators," will be presented on Friday, August 29, 2:30-4:00 p.m. Scott and Andrew will be joined by social dance expert Richard Powers and Anthony Brown, renowned composer, percussionist, ethnomusicologist, and director of the Asian American Jazz Band, to discuss strategies for bringing works derived directly from performing arts collections into live performances.

On Thursday, August 28, 8:30-10:00 a.m., Adriana Cuervo will be one of the presenters of the session, "The Future of the Present: Preserving Avant-Garde Art." The panel, made up of four new professionals and archivists who are working artists will discuss strategies their institutions employ to preserve collections of live, new media, and other ephemeral art as we make the transition into a born-digital world.

As Adriana will complete her term as co-chair at the end of this year's meeting, we will elect her successor during the business meeting. Please nominate a colleague (or yourself!) to serve as co-chair from 2008-2010. Nominations are also sought for steering committee member, as Scott Schwartz's term will also end at this year's meeting. Additionally, our newsletter editor extraordinaire, George Bain, is stepping down as editor next year. If you are interested in serving as his assistant editor for the coming year, and editor the following year, please contact us.

I look forward to seeing all of you in San Francisco.

Information on the SAA Performing Arts Roundtable Meeting in San Francisco

The annual meeting of the SAA Performing Arts Roundtable will take place on Wednesday, August 27, 1:00-3:00 p.m., at the San Francisco Museum of Performance & Design (formerly the San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum) in the Veterans Building, Fourth Floor (next to the War Memorial Opera House across from City Hall) at 401 Van Ness Avenue (at McAllister). For more information, check the following: <http://sfpalm.org>

Our meeting will consist of a business meeting followed by guest presenters Kirsten Tanaka and Joe Evans (see more in the message above).

Following the meeting, members are welcome to visit the Museum's featured exhibition "Art & Artifice: 75 Years of Design at San Francisco Ballet" (<http://www.mpdsf.org/exhibitions.html>) which closes August 30th. Kirsten will also be offering an open house for SAA attendees at the Museum on Tuesday, August 26, from 2-5 p.m. For reservations and information, contact Kirsten at kirstent@mpdsf.org or 415-255-4800, ext 814.

Those wishing to travel as a group to the meeting will gather in the Hilton lobby at 12:30.

Directions to the Museum via public transportation (either option takes approximately 15 minutes from the Hilton):

BART (Powell St. Station to the Civic Center station)
From Civic Center Station walk up Grove St. 3 blocks past City Hall.
Make a right on Van Ness.
Walk half a block to the Veterans Building on the left side of the street.

Or

Muni Bus #5 Fulton
Catch bus at Powell and Market
Get off at the McAllister and Van Ness stop

The meeting will conclude promptly at 3:00 p.m. so that those attending later meetings may do so.

There are a number of restaurants near the Museum, including California Pizza Kitchen, Max's Opera Café, Hayes Street Grill, for members who would like to have lunch in the Museum's neighborhood before the meeting.

Submitted by Susan Brady

News Notes

Sessions on Performing Arts Archives Issues at the SAA Conference

See Susan Brady's "Message from the Co-Chair" above regarding sessions at the SAA conference in San Francisco devoted to issues and topics related to the performing arts and archives. And congratulations to those who worked diligently to submit proposals and were successful.

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 focuses on our users. The article is by a musicology researcher who has used regional music collections in Kentucky and Tennessee for doctoral research projects. As you will see, Kevin Kehrberg was also a recipient of a summer stipend fellowship at Berea College, an excellent form of outreach to assure that collections do get used.

Researching Southern Gospel Music in Kentucky and Tennessee

By **Kevin Kehrberg**

In the early twentieth century, “convention” gospel singing was a widespread pastime in America. Spread through singing schools and songbooks utilizing a seven shape-note system, convention gospel music (also called “southern gospel”) became the most popular form of amateur musical engagement in many areas, particularly in rural regions of the southern and southeastern United States.¹ Certain localities could often boast several well-polished church choirs, community groups, and/or gospel quartets that used convention songbooks (issued each year with new songs) as the basis for their singing. Thanks to their wide use among early radio and recording artists (e.g., string bands, professional quartets, country singers), many

convention songs became extremely popular among the national populace as well.

Despite its former popularity, convention singing—a major component of America’s lesser-known white gospel tradition—remains largely untouched by scholarly scrutiny. There are, however, a handful of performing arts collections devoted to American vernacular and popular music that contain holdings connected to this tradition. I have spent time at two such institutions in the past year doing research on this topic: the Southern Appalachian Archives at Berea College (Berea, Kentucky) and the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University (Murfreesboro, Tennessee).

The Southern Appalachian Archives

The Southern Appalachian Archives resides within the Special Collections and Archives Department at Berea College’s Hutchins Library. It houses organizational records,

¹ See, for example, William Lynwood Montell, *Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky, 1900-1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

personal papers, oral histories, and photographs that document the history and culture of the Southern Appalachian region. These archives also include Berea's massive and unparalleled Appalachian Sound Archives, largely consisting of non-commercial material and profuse in such areas as fiddle and banjo field recordings; ballad singing; folktales and legends; and Old Regular Baptist services. Specific collections include the *Appalachian Ballad and Folk Music Collection, 1911-1975*; *John C. Campbell Folk School Collection, 1909-1981*; *John Harrod Kentucky Fiddle Music Collection*; *Reuben Powell Early Country Music Collection, 1910-1982*; and the *William H. Tallmadge Baptist Hymnody Collection, 1968-1980*.

In 2005, Berea College began its Appalachian Music Fellowship Program, an initiative that supports graduate students, faculty, public school teachers, and/or performers in one to three month residencies for the purpose of conducting research in the Appalachian Sound Archives and to promote the preservation of and access to its contents. For my fellowship project during the summer of 2007, I worked primarily with the *John Lair Papers, 1930-1984*. Lair was the famous impresario behind the *Renfro Valley* radio barn dance programs broadcast from Renfro Valley, Kentucky, that began in the late-1930s. During the 1940s and '50s, Lair's *Renfro Valley* produced some of the most successful country music radio programming in America. The gospel singing groups captured on the archive's numerous non-commercial recordings of *Renfro Valley* radio programs were the main foci of my research.

The bulk of audio material I examined had been converted from its original format (transcription discs, reel tapes, etc.) to high-

resolution digital files and stored on Berea's dedicated server that is backed up at remote locations. The sound archive's contents are fully searchable via an online database available through Hutchins Library's Sound Archives webpage. In addition, many selected audio recordings from the more than 90,000 entries in the Appalachian Sound Archives can be downloaded online through the Digital Library of Appalachia (www.aca-dla.org). The DLA is a remarkable web resource that gives online access to archival and historical materials (recordings, documents, photographs) related to the Appalachian region and its culture. Its contents come from the special collections of twelve Appalachian College Association member libraries joined in a mutual effort to make such materials more available for public use. Through the DLA, rare and unique performing arts media from Berea's Southern Appalachian Archives is now available from any computer with online capabilities.

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Researching in Berea's Southern Appalachian Archives was a dream. My residency there was very productive due to the archive's meticulous organization and its extremely knowledgeable staff. Thanks to their help, my completed work included adding new oral histories of former performers who had worked at *Renfro Valley* and uncovering some 1950s radio broadcasts in need of preservation (portions

of which are now accessible via the DLA). Information on Berea College's Southern Appalachian Archives, the Appalachian Music Fellowship Program, and the Appalachian Sound Archives (including specific details on their sound preservation techniques) can all be found at www.berea.edu/hutchinslibrary/specialcollections.

The Center for Popular Music

Established in 1985, the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University is a research library and archive dedicated to the study and preservation of American popular music from the colonial era to the present. The CPM's mission, as stated on its website, is to "promote research and scholarship in American vernacular music, and to foster an understanding and appreciation of American's diverse musical culture."² In addition to being a research center, the CPM also presents public concerts and events and sponsors research projects of its own for publication.

The CPM's collection is divided into nine subgroups: sheet music and broadsides; rare books; sound recordings; music trade catalogs; the reading room collection (reference works, discographies, and other published books); periodicals; performance documents; archives/manuscript collections; and photographs. Most of these subgroups are conveniently searchable online via the Center's special collections databases. Areas of particular depth include rock and roll and its musical roots, the music of Tennessee and the southeast United States, and various forms of vernacular religious music. It also deserves mention that the large private collection of the late Charles K. Wolfe, who passed away in 2006, is gradually being processed and catalogued into the CPM's holdings. A longtime MTSU faculty

² <http://popmusic.mtsu.edu>

member, Wolfe was a prolific author, scholar, and one of the foremost authorities on American music, especially country and gospel music.

The [Center for Popular Music] is one of the few institutions realizing the importance of this greatly understudied area of American music. As a result, they currently own the largest collection of convention shape-note songbooks amassed by any public entity.

I visited the CPM to conduct research in its strong collection of vernacular religious music. My dissertation's main focus is the twentieth-century gospel song composer Albert E. Brumley ("I'll Fly Away," "I'll Meet You in the Morning," "Turn Your Radio On"). Without question, Brumley was the most recognizable composer to emerge from the convention singing tradition; however, most of his five hundred-plus published works only appeared one or two times, and Brumley himself kept poor record of his compositions. Thus, the annual convention songbooks from the 1920s to the 1970s—published by such firms as the Stamp-Baxter Music Co., the James D. Vaughan Music Publishing Co., and the Hartford Music Co.—remain the best resource in which to find Brumley's music. The CPM is one of the few institutions realizing the importance of this greatly understudied area of American music. As a result, they currently own the largest collection of convention shape-note songbooks amassed by any public entity. Moreover, all of these songbooks have been catalogued in their rare books database and

are searchable online, making my work there a breeze.

As with Berea, I found the staff at the CPM very friendly and willing to assist me in any way possible. Although they were short on help during my visit this summer, everything went as smoothly as I could have hoped. For more information on the CPM and to browse its collections, please visit their website at <http://popmusic.mtsu.edu>.

American music history is becoming increasingly effective as a lens through which to view and interpret our complex culture. However, as we have progressed in

our documentation and recognition of America's diverse musical legacy, some areas have been left behind. Only by examining the complete spectrum of American popular and vernacular music can we hope to fully understand the enormity of its cultural complexities and its impact on shaping our society. Thankfully, Berea College's Hutchins Library and Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Popular Music have taken a leading role in preserving America's more overlooked musical traditions, and they are doing an exemplary job.

Kevin Kehrberg is a Ph.D. candidate in musicology at the University of Kentucky. He is currently completing a dissertation titled "I'll Fly Away": The Music and Career of Albert E. Brumley and the Cultural Impact of his Most Famous Composition." A webpage for the Appalachian Music Fellowship project that he completed at Berea College exists at www.berea.edu/hutchinslibrary/specialcollections/amfpkehrberg2007

International Notes

This article for the "International Notes" section, on the Mander & Mitchenson Theatre Collection in the UK, is provided by US-transplant Kristy Davis. The editor wishes to express his thanks to former co-chair Helice Koffler for establishing the contact.

“The Raymond Mander & Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection: Enhancing Access for Research”

By Kristy Davis

The Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection (MMTC) is one of the largest collections of theatre and performance related material in the UK. It began in the late 1930's when the two actors

with an interest in collecting, Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, met during a production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the London Docklands Settlement in the East End of London. Over the course of

their lives, they accumulated a vast collection of theatre ephemera from works of art focusing on theatrical subjects to books, costumes -- Sarah Bernhardt and Sir Henry Irving among others -- and props. While they purchased much of the material from market stalls and auctions, many of the items were donated to the collection by their friends, such as Sir Noël Coward, Dame Sybil Thorndike and Sir John Gielgud or other theatre ephemera collectors. Through the years, Mander and Mitchenson advised writers, researchers and members of the theatre profession, and supplied materials and illustrations for thousands of books, articles and theatre programmes. Additionally, they wrote several scholarly books themselves which drew on their collection, and which remain definitive in the field: *Theatrical Companions* to Coward, Shaw and Maugham; *The Theatres of London* and *Lost Theatres of London*; along with *Musical Comedy, Revue and Pantomime*. However, by the late 1970's, the collection had outgrown their home. Prompted by a compulsory purchase order issued by Lewisham Borough Council, a charitable trust was formed under the presidency of Lord Olivier in 1977 to ensure its long-term future. Currently, the President of the Trust is Joan Plowright CBE, the Lady Olivier. In September 2001, assisted by a generous grant from the Jerwood Foundation, the collection became part of the Jerwood Library of the Performing Arts at Trinity College of Music, and found a permanent home at the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich, London.

One of the unique things about this collection is how it's grown from an amateur interest in collecting theatre ephemera into one of the most comprehensive research collections of British theatre materials. The core of the MMTC is the extraordinary research

archive, comprising 1,500 archive boxes containing over 1 million items of theatre ephemera, and the library of ca. 15,000 books. The collection's holdings are particularly strong in the Victorian and Edwardian periods of London theatre. Additionally, there are files on regional theatres, on actors and actresses, and on specialist subjects such as circus, variety, puppetry and pantomime. Musicians and dancers of note are also represented.

While [Mander and Mitchenson] purchased much of the material from market stalls and auctions, many of the items were donated to the collection by their friends, such as Sir Noël Coward, Dame Sybil Thorndike and Sir John Gielgud or other theatre ephemera collectors.

Another distinctive aspect of the MMTC is how the ephemera collection is organized. Instead of adhering to standard archival practice of keeping the original order, Mander and Mitchenson created their own classification system and arranged the material (press cuttings, photographs, programmes, flyers, and playbills) first by subject, then chronologically by production for the production information and alphabetically for the personal information. While this makes the material in the collection easily findable, it makes it more difficult to know the original order and provenance.

From February 2003 to January 2006, the MMTC was involved in a project of cataloguing and digitising theatre ephemera from its holdings of pre-1890 London

theatres. The three-year project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and was initiated by one of the MMTC's Trustees, Dr. Sophie Nield. Currently, the online catalogue comprises 1,850 collection level records, 6,000 item level records and 2,000 digital images.

Up until the commencement of an AHRC grant project in 2003, none of the MMTC's holdings were catalogued by archival standards or were available online; and, the book collection was catalogued in either the Simon Trussler Performing Arts Classification System or Dewey and was accessible through a slip catalogue. Previously, it was only the excellent personal knowledge of Richard Mangan, Administrator, gained over many years association, which served as finding aid for researchers and members of the profession.

It was decided that the material would be catalogued in a modified MARC format using ISAD(G) standards in the SIRSI Unicorn Workflow database that was used in conjunction with our neighbours, the Jerwood Library of the Performing Arts at Trinity College of Music. Some of the main challenges faced in cataloguing the collection fell in the following areas: amount and type of description; the indexing of names; creation of a subject thesaurus; and identifying unlabeled or poorly labeled materials. These are all challenges that any archivist, curator or librarian faces when working with a collection that has not had a previous physical catalogue.

One particular challenge relates to how to best describe the material. Descriptive cataloguing, by nature, allows a certain amount of creativity and flexibility; however, personal writing styles, experience and background also influence the amount and type of description. Therefore, it is

important that the description adheres to some basic standards and parameters so that the material described can be accurately conveyed to anyone reading the description field of the catalogue.

Another area of concern is how best to date items. Many production-related items in the collection have been hand-dated. However, these dates usually relate to a play's opening night rather than the date the document was created. Where there is no other date given, we used the hand-written date (in square brackets) in the title and publication fields, and include an explanation of this in the description field.

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Regarding the subject thesaurus, the main issue has been that there is no specific authoritative thesaurus for theatre or the performing arts, so many collections work with the accepted thesauri such as UKAT, UNESCO, AAT, and Library of Congress and tailor them to their needs. Therefore, one of the challenges of the project has been to bring the thesaurus in line with accepted authoritative sources and tidy up its structure, while serving the specificity of the Mander and Mitchenson holdings.

A similar balance between accessibility and specificity lay with the indexing of names of the people found in the programmes, playbills. It was common practice in the 19th century and earlier to be more flexible

with the spelling of people's names, so an actor might appear in several productions, yet their name would be spelled slightly differently in each programme. Since there was no way of knowing if it was the same actor in each piece, both spellings of the name were indexed. With epithets, the decision was made not to add the epithet 'actor, singer, dancer' after these types of performers due to the sheer number of people that were added, so users may assume with confidence that a name without an epithet is one of these three professions. The other epithets are based upon the title given to the person in the programme, however, with the distinction of issuing a blanket term, such as 'scenery' to any individual who is listed as 'scenic artist,' 'scene designer,' etc. in order to simplify matters.

Even though the AHRC-grant funded project to begin cataloguing and digitising the collection was a fixed-term three year project; it laid the foundation for future efforts. For example, after the project ended I was hired as the Archive Officer/Cataloguer and continue to catalogue items in the collection along with my other duties. The challenges of making the Mander & Mitchenson Theatre Collection accessible to researchers are still ongoing; however, we now have an updated website (<http://www.mander-and-mitchenson.co.uk>) which features a scrolling picture gallery of the artworks found in our collection and an online, searchable catalogue and digital image archive of the collections theatre ephemera.

Kristy Davis is Archive Officer/ Cataloguer at the Mander and Mitchenson Collection, and was previously Archive Cataloguer on the AHRC Project. Kristy received an MLS with a specialization in Art Librarianship and Special Collections from Indiana University, Bloomington, IN (2004), a MA in Visual Culture specialization Costume Studies from New York University, New York, NY (2000) and a BA in Art History and Russian from Macalester College, St. Paul, MN (1997).

News of Roundtable Members and Associates

Kathleen Williams has been promoted to Executive Director of the National Historic Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Kathleen has been a supportive friend for the archives staff at the Houston Symphony Orchestra. May she do well in her new job with NHPRC!

Editor's Corner

Annual Meeting Discussion Topic – An Opportunity for Your Contribution

Co-Chair Susan Brady has announced in her “Message from the Co-Chair” there will be a discussion at the San Francisco meeting about roundtable members adopting a collaborative project to develop an “appropriate standardized form and genre terms for materials documenting scenic, lighting and costume design”. This is a heads-up call announced before the meeting, giving one and all a chance to mull over the idea ahead of time. Moving into action on this (or any similar idea) does not require everyone’s energy. But this is a chance for individuals to work on a professional project beyond day-to-day responsibilities and for the roundtable to realize its full potential. If you are interested in helping, please come prepared to participate or let Susan know in advance of your interest.

Note: the New Distribution System for the Newsletter Is Now in Place

This is the first issue of *Performance!* that is being distributed via the new structure put into place by SAA Headquarters. The issue will also be posted shortly on the SAA Performing Arts Roundtable web site www.archivists.org/saagroups/performart/.

Please note that SAA new e-mail discussion list system provides an easier method for members of the roundtable to exchange information. From this point on, the newsletter will be distributed only through the SAA structure. (Again, a person does not have to be a member of SAA to join an SAA roundtable.)

What does this mean for members? Three things:

- First of all, welcome to the many people who are part of the discussion list through SAA. Many of the fifty-plus names there are new to the roundtable. Your interest in matters related to the intersection of archives and the performing arts is great to see.
- Second, for the people (more than 120) that are *only* on the old membership list and newsletter distribution method (an attachment to an e-mail communication), please go to the SAA web site and register for the new list (and also see who else is a member).
- Third, since there is little overlap between the two lists, the size of the Performing Arts Roundtable—and the things the group can do—stands to grow significantly.

From the editor’s perspective, the new structure will work better. ‘Tis time to go for it!

The Next Issue

The next issue should include a new **Reports from the Field** article or two and other regular features. It is scheduled to appear in December.

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