PERFORMANCE!

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

Issue for Spring - Summer 2009

[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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Message from the Roundtable Co-Chair

Deep in the Heart of Texas

By Susan Brady

As a native Austinite, I’m really looking forward to the SAA Annual Meeting next month. Despite the heat, Austin is a wonderful place to visit in the summer, and I know that the local arrangements committee will provide lots of ideas for cool ways to enjoy the city. There are many music venues not far from the conference hotel, and there are always performances by theatre and dance companies taking place in traditional and non-traditional performance spaces all over town. Pick up a copy of the free Austin Chronicle newspaper http://www.austinchronicle.com/ when you get to town and check out the arts calendar.

As noted in this issue, the Roundtable meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 12, from 1-3 p.m. at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. The business meeting agenda includes updates on various Roundtable and institutional projects, the election of a new co-chair and a strategic planning committee member, and discussion of future Roundtable activities. Following the business meeting Helen Adair, Associate Curator of Performing Arts at the Ransom Center, will provide us with an introduction to the magnificent holdings of the
Center. This will be a real treat and I am very thankful to Helen for giving us this wonderful opportunity.

Helen will also be one of the speakers at the Roundtable-sponsored session, “Saving De Niro’s Boxing Trunks: Sustaining Performing Arts Archives Collaboratively,” on Saturday, August 15, at 9:30 a.m. With additional presenters Karen Nickeson, Acting Curator of the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and Libby Smigel, Project Director of the Dance Heritage Coalition, this session will highlight recent collaborative projects that have addressed 21st-century cataloging, preservation, and fair use issues in ways that will help sustain the arts for future generations.

As I reach the end of my term as co-chair, I want to thank all of you who have helped me continue the work of the Roundtable. I would like to thank particularly George Bain who, after almost ten years as newsletter editor, will be handing over the editorship to Mary Gallant (who has been serving as co-editor over the past year). George has done a spectacular job, keeping us informed of Roundtable and member activities and finding contributors with interesting stories to tell. I am most appreciative that Mary has agreed to accept the editorship. Thanks also to outgoing steering committee member Andy Wentink, continuing steering committee member Lisa Hooper, and to Helice Koffler who always keeps us up to date via the Roundtable web site. And many thanks to my co-chair Peggy Alexander with whom I’ve had the pleasure of getting to know over the past year. I look forward to continuing my work with Roundtable members who have volunteered to assist in developing form and genre terms for materials documenting scenic, lighting and costume design. In working toward the Roundtable goal of coordinating projects with other professional organizations, I have identified members of the Theatre Library Association who are also interested in becoming involved in this project. News of the progress of the project will be reported in future issues of Performance! Please contact me if you are interested in joining the project.

Please nominate a colleague or yourself for Co-Chair or Steering Committee member. Send your nominations to me or to Peggy Alexander. You don’t have to be present at the Roundtable meeting to be elected.

I hope to see many of you in Austin!

Information about the Society of American Archivists Performing Arts Roundtable’s Business Meeting—and the Austin Conference

By Susan Brady

I am very pleased to announce that the Performing Arts Roundtable meeting will take place at the Harry Ransom Center www.hrc.utexas.edu/ at the University of Texas from 1-3 p.m. on
Wednesday, August 12. Following our business meeting Helen Adair, Associate Curator of Performing Arts at the Ransom Center, has graciously agreed to provide us with a tour of her collection and show us examples of the fabulous performing arts related items held by the Center. This is a wonderful opportunity to visit the Center, whose performing arts holdings includes material documenting theater, opera, film, dance, popular entertainment and much more.

The Ransom Center is located at the corner of 21st and Guadalupe Streets, on the campus of the University of Texas, just north of downtown Austin. While one could walk from the Hilton to the Ransom Center, buses and shared taxis are preferable given the August temperatures in Austin. Please see bus routes/maps attached, or visit the Capitol Metro web site www.capmetro.org. Bus routes 1 and 5 run straight up Congress Avenue, and both stop very close to the Ransom Center. Bus 101 also takes the same route, but it is an express bus, has fewer stops, and costs $1.50 versus 75 cents for the other buses. For any of these routes, you'll need to walk west from the Hilton to Congress Avenue to catch the bus.

Please also plan to attend the Roundtable-sponsored session, “Saving De Niro’s Boxing Trunks: Sustaining Performing Arts Archives Collaboratively,” on Saturday, August 15, at 9:30 a.m. With Helen Adair of the Ransom Center, Karen Nickeson, Acting Curator of the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and Libby Smigel, Project Director of the Dance Heritage Coalition, this session will highlight recent collaborative projects that have addressed 21st-century cataloging, preservation, and fair use issues in ways that will help sustain the arts for future generations.

I look forward to seeing you all at the meeting in Austin. Please contact me if you have any questions.

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**News Notes**

**Merce Cunningham Dance Materials**

Recently, choreographer Merce Cunningham announced his plans for preserving his own modern choreographic works. *The New York Times* reported the Merce Cunningham Trust will have licensing control of his dances, and in anticipation, Cunningham associates will be preparing detailed records of his choreography. Provisions in order, Cunningham still voiced his apprehension: “It’s really a concern about how…you preserve the elements of an art which is really evanescent, which is really like water. It can disappear. This is a way of keeping it--at least with our experience here--of keeping it alive.” See *Merce Cunningham Makes a Plan to Preserve His Dance Legacy* by Daniel J. Wakin. The New York Times, 6/10.2009.

(Submitted by Sylvia Kollar; see her related article in the “Reports from the Field” Section.)
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 reports in this issue explore two differing matters. In the first, Sylvia Kollar of the Winthrop Group professional services firm, writes about her—and the firm’s—work over time with the Paul Taylor Dance Company both to organize its records of enduring value and to assure the authenticity of its artistic legacy for future generations. In the second, Christina Prucha details the manner by which the records of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) proved their usefulness during the group’s golden anniversary year and provided valuable exposure within its community to the ACDA’s archival operation.

Preserving Dance: Initiatives and Challenges at the Paul Taylor Dance Company Archives

By Sylvia Kollar

“Dance is a form of Order, a minor form and unimportant to many, but even so it’s one that should be played at reverently. And, though sacred, dance is an artifice, never natural. Ordered and mutated, yes; natural, no. Like other dance makers, I take my cues from such natural phenomena as the mechanics of water motion, moving formations of scaled, winged and warmer creatures, the cycles of spheres, odd spectacles such as weddings, funerals, and lines of depositors at banks. Choreography is monkey see, monkey do.” --- Paul Taylor.

Since the Martha Graham ‘debacle’ when this great icon of American dance incorrectly presumed sole ownership of her creative work, choreographers have had the task of integrating a new Order in their art – that of safeguarding their intellectual property rights. After much litigation, the rights to Graham’s works were found to belong to the Martha Graham Center, and

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not to Ronald Protas to whom she formally willed the body of her choreographic work. Now, choreographers and their heirs, foundations, trusts and lawyers dissect, discuss and contract legacy. Who will teach? Who will dance? Who will stage a production? The answers to these questions should limit copyright infringement and insure authenticity of a dancer/choreographer’s art for future audiences. Yet, insuring how those who are chosen will teach, dance, and stage a production in a particular repertory very well may emerge from the work of current and future archivists. As a Winthrop Group consulting archivist for the Paul Taylor Dance Company in New York, assisting in preserving the legacy of someone deemed a National Treasure, this work had to be met with energy, creativity, order and reverence.

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The Company first engaged Winthrop (www.winthropgroup.com) in 1995 to undertake an initial survey of the non-current records and audio-visual materials and prepare a recommendations report in preparation for establishing the Archives as part of their Repertory Preservation Project. We then were selected to proceed with implementation and to provide on-going archival services. As a result, Winthrop has been responsible since 1995 for (1) managing, processing and cataloging the archival collections and (2) undertaking reference and research work in response to questions from Paul Taylor Dance Company management, staff, and dancers and from approved scholars, journalists, etc. The collections are kept on Company premises and the database finding aid is accessible on the Company's intranet.

The Paul Taylor Dance Company Archives houses Mr. Taylor’s choreography notebooks; rehearsal, performance and promotional photographs; repertory preservation video; scrapbooks; correspondence; and extensive tour files that evidence Taylor’s inventiveness and passion for the art of modern dance. Company dancers watch video performances to learn the choreography of a revived dance. The Taylor School’s teachers (current Company dancers and alumni) who focus on modern techniques and Taylor’s style, study moving and still images to reinforce the ‘muscle memory’ on which they rely for movement, gestures, even breathing. Production staff require stage specifications from past tours, lighting and set designs. Management generates and needs to retrieve legal documentation in order to license choreography. The person who heads Taylor’s media relations retrieves images, editorial coverage, choreographic history to develop publicity and educate reporters and audiences. Requests from the dance community, both internal and external, are forwarded to the Company’s General Manager who often forwards the request to be considered by Mr. Taylor. Why? Some of the caution arises from concern about intellectual property protection. Does the archival evidence document what we know as the Paul Taylor repertory so completely that one could learn, teach, and produce the choreography by consulting just audiovisual materials and/or Laban notation? Would it be considered an infringement on intellectual property rights?

Photographs in the Paul Taylor collection capture sets and costumes as well as
individual expressions and gestures from Mr. Taylor’s choreography of more than 125 dances. Until recently individual photographers routinely retained copyright of the dance pictures they made. The Paul Taylor Dance Foundation purchases copyrights on press photos at the time they are taken by the photographer, and the Foundation does not take any proceeds from scholars, journalists, or others in the dance community that request their permissions. The Foundation has also purchased rights for one-time use of photographs that then revert back to the photographer as detailed in a contract. So, while preserving and cataloguing these visual representations of Taylor’s legacy continues their usefulness to dancers who are learning a piece, the photos often have stringent restrictions on use. The Company’s Board of Trustees will own and license the Company’s work and artistic advisors will monitor the choreography, but will they be obligated to consult the archival evidence? As an archivist, it is impossible not to speculate about the degree to which the collections of the Paul Taylor Dance Company Archives ultimately will serve as the basis for continuing performance and interpretation of Taylor’s choreography.

Mr. Taylor’s own commitment to maintaining his archives indicates that he expects archival resources to serve those who have learned the dances under his own tutelage as well as those who will not have that opportunity. Currently, several Paul Taylor dancers are working to transfer to digital format hundreds of performances and rehearsals originally recorded on VHS tapes. These artists who ‘embody’ the choreography diligently review them to ensure that the counts for each digitized piece are correct. Then it is up to the Archives to capture relevant metadata and update the database records so that consultation of the moving images remains possible. This process sustains the intellectual property ownership, yet choreographers know that ownership is real again only when another dancer performs the piece.

So, while preserving and cataloguing these visual representations of Taylor’s legacy continues their usefulness to dancers who are learning a piece, the photos often have stringent restrictions on use.

Of the five Winthrop archivists who have worked with the Paul Taylor Dance Company collections, four ‘learned’ modern dance in Taylor’s style by taking responsibility for its archival collections. Obviously it is a pale understanding as compared with the way the dancers, production, and administrative staff know and carry out his vision and his artistry. Nonetheless, the archivist’s role in preserving documentation of this ‘ephemeral art’ is part of insuring that authentic performance of the choreographer’s work is available for future dancers to learn and audiences to enjoy. On the fiftieth anniversary of the Paul Taylor Dance Company, dance critic and writer Clive Barnes wondered, “Will the Paul Taylor Dance Company be able to continue without Paul Taylor? I should hope so, especially if the world is careful. As for Taylor’s works, many of these should and will survive, if not in one repertory then in another. He has

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4 These original tapes are sent to an environmentally controlled, off-site storage facility.
created a living library of dance, and it will find its own librarian custodians.” The modern choreographer and dancer understand that her/his art evolves and mutates, but both also should have the reverence to preserve what has been created. Future choreographers, dancers, teachers, and producers will choose, like Paul Taylor, to explore dance’s unique Order. The Paul Taylor Dance Company Archives and other collections of its kind can serve as a navigational tool for those who do.

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5 Barnes, Clive. “Paul Taylor.” Essay written for publication of Paul Taylor: The First Fifty Years Underwritten by Richard and Mary Jo Stanley.
The field of performing arts offers a fun and inviting opportunity for exhibiting. Archivists in this field often have the materials available to them for a truly multimedia experience. But it takes planning to take an archivist from a blank room or screen to an actual exhibit. This article details the process followed by the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) as they prepared for their first museum exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of the organization earlier this year.

The organization was fortunate enough to have built an approximately 1,000 square foot museum when it relocated to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 2004. The room had sat virtually empty from that time until its first exhibit in March 2009. It was used from time-to-time as a meeting space for organizational events and on occasion it was rented out to outside groups. Essentially, the room was a blank slate, ready for use.

The room required that we think about its architecture and flaws from the onset of our planning. The entire southeast side of the room, 65 feet long and 24 feet high, is a panel of windows. Our choices in dealing with this reality were limited. Covering the windows was not financially feasible. Our solution was to use reproductions when possible and to limit our exhibits to less than three months to prevent light damage to any original documents that might be used.

The room also presented a challenge to us. In September 2006 a condensation pan from the air conditioner that sits above the museum overfilled and leaked into the museum. At the time, the photographs from our Wall of Honor, a memorial to the organization’s most respected deceased choir directors, were in the room. Water streamed down the walls and dripped from the ceiling, damaging the ceiling, walls, and some photographs. No disaster plan had ever been created and, newly out of graduate school, I learned both the value of disaster planning and more specifically, how to dry photographs. The damage had to be dealt with before we could host our first exhibit. Luckily, we suffered no damage and the drywall was repaired and the room repainted.
Having resolved the physical space issues, we were able to turn our attention to planning. If possible, a budget should be set during this phase. Due to many extenuating circumstances, however, this was not possible for our exhibit and it cost us time. A budget simply lets you quickly eliminate what you cannot afford. Instead of taking this route, we chose to brainstorm first and eliminate and scale back only when it was necessary.

As part of this brainstorming process, we pulled out all of the recordings and documents that we considered using in the exhibit. The theme was a celebration of our first 50 years. Pulling the documents, photographs, and recordings that told our 50 year story led to a large pile that needed organization. That came from an article that was being written. As part of that article documenting our first 50 years, I contributed a timeline featuring some of the highlights of ACDA’s history. This list then served as the basis for a 100 foot timeline that graced the walls of the museum.

Another innovative idea took the organization’s oldest photograph and created a three-dimensional display from it. An old pop-up display unit became the background. A graphic designer enlarged the background in the photograph so that it became life sized. Cutouts of the individuals in the picture were created by a company specializing in this. Inexpensive or free props from the office and our homes completed the picture. The effect of 3-D gave the picture new life and many stopped toadmire it during the conference.

We brought color into the exhibit with bright banners featuring the cover art from our organization’s periodical. A projector brought color and sound to the walls as we played videos of choirs who had sung at previous ACDA conferences. We brought dimension into the room with the music staff and photographs mounted on the wall and photographs that we hung from a ceiling mounted photo hanging system that we mounted in our window frames. The dimension and color helped to fill the space and draw the eye to areas that might not have otherwise enjoyed viewing.

With the help of two temporary workers, both well-known to the organization, the wall was constructed and the timeline was hung in two weeks.

As part of that article documenting our first 50 years, I contributed a timeline featuring some of the highlights of ACDA’s history. This list then served as the basis for a 100 foot timeline that graced the walls of the museum.
The ACDA Archives reaped many benefits from having created this exhibit. Before this public exhibit, few people realized we existed. Since the exhibit, more people are becoming aware of us and using our facilities. Holding an exhibit also gave us the chance to tell people how they can continue to help, be it financially, through volunteering, or through the donation of relevant materials. The end result has been positive for the organization as a whole.

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These are a few of the ways that ACDA was able to bring the history of our organization and our art form to life. Of importance is that we were able to create an exhibit that celebrated our 50 years using largely materials that were easily available to us. We were able to use the wall space, window space, and room that was available to us to create a three-dimensional exhibit that filled the space with color and sound and drew the eye to places that would have normally been forgotten.

In terms of lessons learned, the biggest hindrance and regret was not having a budget in which to work. While not having a budget gave us the freedom to dream, it also wasted time. I would also suggest creating a disaster plan, if one does not already exist. Reviewing the literature on exhibit design is worth the time. Time, distance, and funds prohibited us from making use of the field’s literature and this was a mistake. Much could have been learned and mistakes avoided with more preparatory reading.

In spite of these flaws, the experience was still worthwhile and engaging. The publicity created by our exhibit fostered interest, questions, and use of our archives and we were able to teach people about the organization’s history in a fun and informative way. We brought back memories to our more established members and we introduced a new generation to the amazing individuals and their actions that created the organization that our members belong to today.

[Editor’s note: see one photo below.]

Christina Prucha (cprucha@acda.org) is a 2005 MLS graduate of the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona in Tucson, AZ. She began her career in Archives in August 2006 upon joining the staff at the American Choral Directors Association in Oklahoma City. ACDA is a professional organization for choir directors and has about 18,000 members.
Editor’s Corner

A New Wrinkle—the Use of Photos
With this issue of Performance! your editors are boldly stepping forward with a big change—we are incorporating photographs as illustration with the Reports from the Field articles. We hope you find them helpful and useful. Web site manager Helice Koffler has put these and others onto Flickr. Use either http://www.flickr.com/photos/13937110@N05/sets/72157621749178169/ or http://tiny.cc/rMw4Z as a link to them. Send any comments or suggestions about these to Mary Gallant (mgallent@cws1.edu).

Yes, You Did Miss an Issue in April
Due to inadvertent circumstances beyond our control there was no issue of Performance! in April. But we have a combined Spring-Summer issue that we hope gives you both good information on the upcoming roundtable business in Austin and food for thought on issues related to archival activity in the area of the performing arts.

A Valedictory and Salutatory Message from the Editor
With this issue your editor for some years is wrapping up this adventure and moving onto new paths. It has been a pleasure serving the members of the SAA Performing Arts Roundtable over time in this capacity, and working with a good group of leaders. It all began with an auspicious moment in the roundtable meeting in Denver (in 2000) when, with no one in charge, La Nina Clayton, bless her soul, broke a long pause of silence and volunteered to step forward as the new leader, and this archivist then volunteered to do an electronic-version newsletter. (There was only one issue my first year, which appeared just before the 2001 meeting.) The work has been an enjoyable ride. It has also proved to be stimulating personally, and a pleasant way to make new acquaintances both really as well as virtually. It is still my hope that some of my comments--such as the proposal for one of our archival educators to have students enter cataloging records for SAA’s electronic newsletters (including of course Performance!) into the World Cat database--will at some point soon see fruition. But in turning over duties to a new Editor, Mary Gallant, with whom I have worked over the past year, I do wish her luck and do await upcoming issues to see what will remain the same and what will change. Thank you, all. (George Bain)

The Next Issue
The next issue should include a new Reports from the Field article or two and other regular features. Look for it to appear in the fall.

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