

PERFORMANCE!



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

Issue for Fall 2006

[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

Raising Our Voices

By Helice Koffler

Now that winter is upon us, it may be difficult for some to recall the wilting temperatures of Washington, D.C. in early August, but many thanks go out to all who were able to attend and contribute to our meeting. For those of you who were unable to make the SAA annual conference, here is a brief recap of Performing Arts Roundtable activities.

A small, but determined group met early on the morning of August 2nd to make a trip to the University of Maryland's Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library (MSPAL). Following a somewhat adventurous journey on the Metro, we were met at the College Park station by library staff members, Judy Markowitz and Bonnie Smolen, who gave us a very much-appreciated lift the rest of the way to the campus. At the facility itself, which opened in 2000, Judy showed us around the general collections, which featured a sophisticated playback system that could deliver a variety of media formats directly to individual or group study carrels or to other locations within the library. In addition to its collections of commercial recordings, MSPAL holds several important media special collections, (including the Jim Henson collection) and Bonnie provided us with an overview of the collections, reading room, and storage areas. We finished our tour with Donald Manildi, the Curator of the International Piano Archives, an extensive collection of recordings, books, scores, programs, and archival papers. Don treated us to a ghostly recital of a piano roll made by Sergei Rachmaninoff in a performance of Mendelssohn's *Spinnlied*, played on a Chickering Ampico reproducing piano and a Bösendorfer digital piano, for purpose of comparison. The tour segued into an impromptu University of Maryland alumni reunion, as a couple of our group (who were UM graduates) headed off to lunch on campus with former supervisors and mentors. The rest of us were driven back to the Metro station and made our way back to the conference site.

Later that same evening, the Performing Arts Roundtable held a brief business meeting in which the energetic and enthusiastic Adriana Cuervo was installed officially as our incoming co-chair for a two-year term (welcome, Adriana and thank you for agreeing to serve!). The group then joined forces with the Recorded Sound Roundtable for a program on issues relating to audio-visual collections and materials. Our first speaker was Ryan Semmes of the Washingtoniana Division of the District of Columbia Public Library who gave us the D.C. Public perspective on the Washington Area Performing Arts Video Archive (WAPAVA) collection, which, since late 2004, has been co-located at the University of Maryland. Still a very heavily utilized collection in the Washingtoniana Division, WAPAVA records selected Washington area stage performances; its board was adamant that the collection also should remain at D.C. Public in order to serve the vision of the collection's originator, Jim Taylor, of easy public access. We also were fortunate enough that evening to be given a very helpful presentation by Peter Brothers of SPECS Bros., the tape restoration firm, who discussed a seven-step physical inspection to identify magnetic tape that is endangered and requires conservation to prevent loss.

SAA's next annual conference will take place August 29–September 2, 2007 in Chicago. Our Roundtable has endorsed one session proposal for the general conference program, a special focus session submitted by Peter Brothers, “Preserving Your Audio and Video Assets,” which is an expanded version of the presentation given by Peter at last August’s meeting. We are grateful to Peter for his support of the Roundtable and continued willingness to develop programming of interest to the performing arts archives community. As Adriana and I plan for Chicago, we would be delighted to get your input regarding possible speakers for our meeting, suggestions for field trips in the Chicago area, or ideas for other activities. Please contact either of us directly or via the listserv (performarts@lists.archivists.org). The usefulness and vitality of this Roundtable depends directly on the creativity and participation of its members.

In closing, I would just like to take this opportunity to use the bully pulpit once more to remind you of the sad situation confronting our colleagues in London (full disclosure: the Theatre Museum hosted my library school internship or “placement”). As of this writing, the Theatre Museum has closed its doors to the public after less than twenty years of operating as a museum, and, in effect, currently exists in public form only as a hastily revamped Web site (<http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/theatre/>). While archival and other materials from the collection will still be available to researchers, access by the general public for the foreseeable future will be extremely limited—a betrayal of the modest ambition of Gabrielle Enthoven (whose initial bequest formed the basis of the museum’s collections) for a single location where “valuable collections of things theatrical...could be safely housed and easy of access” (*Observer*, 10 November 1911). Some small hope remains that the museum could re-open at its former site in Covent Garden, but it is only through exerting continued pressure that the Victoria and Albert Museum will be forced to follow through on either its vaguely stated “plans to develop a new gallery at the V&A in South Kensington” or to come up with some alternative, workable solution; in short, “to fulfill its statutory obligation under the Heritage Act 1983 to set up and maintain a separate Theatre Museum” (*Guardians of the Theatre Museum*). I once again invite you to have a look at the Web site created by the Guardians of the Theatre Museum, which provides considerable background information, as well as the chance for you to add your voice: <http://www.theatremuseumguardians.org.uk/>.

Society of American Archivists Performing Arts Roundtable Annual Meeting

Co-chair Karen Spicher called to order the annual meeting of the SAA Performing Arts Roundtable in the Washington, DC Hilton Hotel at 5:05 p.m. on Wednesday, August 2, 2006. There were 20 people attending. Spicher introduced herself and co-chair Helice Koffler and then asked the attendees to introduce themselves.

With Spicher’s term wrapping up, she introduced Adriana Cuervo who had agreed to serve a two-year term as roundtable co-chair. The membership approved Cuervo as co-chair.

Sheryl Williams, the SAA Council liaison to the roundtable, made several announcements. Spicher followed with an announcement about a gathering on Friday evening in memory of roundtable founding member, Leslie Hansen Kopp. She reported that George Bain would serve as roundtable newsletter for another year. Announcements from the floor included Susan Brady, representing the Theatre Library Association, noted the TLA plenary to be held at the upcoming Chicago meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research in November, as well as the TLA symposia on Performance Reclamation to take place in New York in February 2007. Matt Snyder mentioned the official formation of the Music Library Association Working Group on Archival Music Materials at that organization's meeting in Nashville. Koffler thanked Spicher for her service with the roundtable, then Cuervo, representing the SAA Program Committee, spoke briefly about the process for submitting session proposals for SAA 2006, which have to be submitted by October 9th.

The group then migrated to another room to meet jointly with the Recorded Sound Roundtable for presentations by Peter Brothers of SPECS Brothers and Ryan Semmes, Archivist of the DC Community Archives in the Washingtoniana Division of the District of Columbia Public Library. Brothers laid out a seven-step examination for evaluating the physical condition of magnetic tapes. If any of the seven steps is a problem, Brothers contended, a tape is endangered so do not play it, seek help. Semmes described the Washington Area Performing Arts Video Archives started by James (Jim) Taylor Collection, now shared with the University of Maryland.

With time exhausted, Spicher declared the meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Submitted by George Bain

News Notes

Mozart's 250

2006, according to an Associated Press news report, was the 250th anniversary year of the birth of Mozart, and the anniversary was duly celebrated through concerts and performances across his native Austria. And Mozart "enthusiasts, students, and scholars can now access the immortal composer's entire catalog through a free online <http://dme.mozarteum.at>, launched December 11." The web site includes manuscript materials as well as 8,000 pages of commentary published since 1954. The new site will be adding more content over the upcoming months.

"Stars and Treasures Exhibit" at the NYPL

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts opened a new exhibit, "Stars and Treasures: 75 Years of Collecting Theatre," in November. According to a press release, "The exhibition will consist of artifacts that...in many cases, have never before been seen by the public. Among the items featured in the exhibition will be costume jewelry worn by Edwin Booth in Hamlet, costume designs by Cecil Beaton for the original production of My Fair Lady,

a bejeweled belt worn by Sarah Bernhardt in Cleopatra [and others]....” The exhibit runs to early May, 2007.

Library of Congress – Performing Arts Encyclopedia

Have you seen the Library of Congress’ “Performing Arts Encyclopedia” web site? The link to this “guide to the performing arts collections and exhibitions at the Library of Congress” is <http://www.loc.gov/performingarts/encyclopedia>. The Library says the site will be updated and expanded regularly.

Performing Arts Archives Blog at Temple University

A little play on Google turned up an interesting site, a Performing Arts library blog in the Temple University Libraries web site. To follow the blog link to http://blog.temple.edu/liblog/archives/performing_arts/.

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 describes in detail the organization, work flow, and accomplishments of the Wilson Project at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. In a field where numerous archivists work in small shops or even alone, not many archivists have the opportunity to participate in a \$10 million, seven-year project. By its scope and magnitude, this performing arts archives story is worthy of coverage, and Mary Ellen Rogan has provided an informative article.

The Wilson Project, An Archival Success Story

By Mary Ellen Rogan

The Wilson Processing Project, named for our donor Robert W. Wilson, is a 10 million dollar project for the processing of backlog materials at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The project, originally begun as a five year project, was

expanded to seven due to a slow start after September 11. The project processes archival collections and catalogs audiovisual materials from the divisions at the Performing Arts Library, including the Music Division, The Billy Rose Theatre

Division, The Jerome Robbins Dance Division and the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound (R&H). The project is housed at the Library Annex on West 43rd Street and has a staff of about 29 full time employees and a rotating group of interns. To date the project has processed over 120 archival collections; 70000 LP recordings and over 2000 archival video, film and sound recordings. Some collections include: Jerome Robbins, Paddy Chayefsky, Jose Limon, Henry Cowell, Angna Enters, Circle Rep, Susannah McCorkle, Alexander Cohen, Patricia Zippodt, Teo Macero, Boris Aronson, Ted Shawn, Donald Oenslager, and the New York Shakespeare Festival to name just a few.

Library President Paul LeClerc was instrumental in making the request to philanthropist Robert W. Wilson. Aware of the backlog problems at the Performing Arts Library, President LeClerc reached out to Robert Wilson to finance the processing project. Backlogs have grown through time at the Performing Arts Library. Staff shortages, lack of archival processing techniques, sheer volume of donations and the inability to handle and preserve the volume of audiovisual materials created a situation where about 60% of the audiovisual, archival and ephemeral holdings of the divisions were either not processed or not available to the public through the online Library catalog.

The project was planned over the course of about one year with initial surveys completed by each of the performing arts divisions. The divisions were given criteria for inclusion by the Director of the Research Libraries along with a cut-off date that would include materials accessioned before January 2001.

It was then decided how to divide the work. Priorities were set and workplans were created. Based on the money earmarked for the project informed decisions were made concerning the work that would be completed for each of the divisions. The priorities and work to be accomplished also allowed us to then estimate the size of the staff needed to accomplish our goals. For example, since we had decided that the R&H portion of the project would be an outsourced to OCLC, we would not need as many catalogers for R&H and most of the money spent would be on the contract.

We now know that assigning large collections back to an archivist can slow down processing.... Because of this we have instituted a rule that there will always be a small collection to process following large collections.

Our next challenge was finding a space large enough for the project. The sheer size of the staff, as well as the space required for archival processing, seriously limited our options. We decided that the best location would be the Library Annex that had been wired recently for the LPA relocation when that Center had been renovated. Start up was slow because of 9/11 and we did not reach our full staff complement until May 2004. This caused us a lag time of at least 18 months.

The current organization of the unit consists of a Project Manager and an Administrative Assistant, one EAD Coordinator, a Head Archivist, 13 Processing Archivists, 4 full-

time Technical Assistants and 1 half-time Technical Assistant. For the audiovisual component we have 1 Head Cataloger, 1 AV Preservation Specialist, 4 Catalogers, 1 Technical Specialist and 1 Technical Assistant.

Because we are a project that has been given a list of priorities to complete, we are using a quota system to keep the workflow on track. Based on personal processing experience and on standards within the archival community, we have found that we average about 110 linear feet per professional archivist per year. Charts have been created and each staff member knows the collections they have been assigned during the year. There is also a timeline to keep track of progress and deadlines. If problems arise within a collection, timelines can be adjusted.

As a learning experience the project has been invaluable. Through the past few years we have developed strategies to keep on track. We now know that assigning large collections back to back to an archivist can slow down processing. Archivists seem to need a small collection as a breather in order to psychologically feel that they are accomplishing goals. Because of this we have instituted a rule that there will always be a small collection to process following large collections.

We have also learned to work to people's strengths and make adjustments when we find something doesn't work. Some staff just can't do large collections. They get bogged down and seem to lose momentum and productivity suffers. We give these staff members smaller collections and that improves productivity. We have also given our better writers the smaller collections. Those who enjoy the writing and research

move at a quicker pace through these collections.

Another technique we have used is to create teams of archivists for very large collections. We divide up series and have staff work on discrete portions of the collection. Series descriptions are written by the assigned archivist, and later the lead processor pulls the work together, writing the biographical and scope and content note. We often will put slower processors in a team situation to keep them moving forward.

Managing staff is always a challenge. The majority of the staff we have hired are new archivists and catalogers. Often we have hired our interns and get staff right after graduation. With a group of this type, mentoring has been the best approach. Being visible to the staff, having an interest in the collections they are working on and encouraging them to interact and ask questions has created a positive and relaxed work environment even though we are working with timetables and quotes.

Creating a team spirit with occasional pizza and staff breakfast meetings helps bring the group together. Flex-time is a great way to give perks in an institution that doesn't allow monetary rewards. Since the project has no public service component we have the luxury of letting people work flex-time. Supervisors have staggered their hours between 7 AM and 6 PM so that staff can pick their schedules to fit needs and preferences.

Because of the size of the staff there is always staff turnover and it is difficult to keep the department at a full complement. People come and go and must be replaced quickly. Internships have helped with this and we have hired many of our interns for

full-time staff positions. We have been very successful with our use of interns and usually generate interest in our internships by scheduling class tours with archive and library school students. Currently there are four staff members who were interns here.

Creating a team spirit with occasional pizza and staff breakfast meetings helps bring the group together.

Working with Human Resources becomes critical in this situation. Creating a working relationship with Human Resources is crucial in order to facilitate hiring for time sensitive projects. We spend time explaining the duties of the position and the importance of archival experience as well as the need for a quick turnaround. Sometimes, as the nature of work changes, job descriptions needed to be reevaluated for new initiatives.

This can be seen in our expansion of the Wilson Project's scope of work. Not only are we processing archival collections and cataloging backlog audiovisual materials, we are now involved in the migration of databases to the Research Libraries' online catalog, CATNYP. To date, conversion of

four of the databases are underway and more are planned for the future. The Performing Arts Library has also included us as part of the team to meet with donors. We have been asked to consult and draft budgets for grants and project planning. A special addition has been the management of grant projects for the Performing Arts Library, most recently the Paddy Chayefsky Papers and the Circle in the Square Records.

As funding becomes available the Library proposes to continue and expand the project to include unprocessed and underprocessed collections in other divisions within the New York Public Library with the goal of making them accessible to the public via the Library's web interface.

The project has been a positive experience for the New York Public Library, the Library for the Performing Arts and myself. As a model it is an example of how a focused effort with financial backing can benefit the Library and the public. It is our hope that it will be a model for the organization of archival processing and future backlog projects and an example of how with a supportive infrastructure, processing can improve and backlogs will shrink.

Archivist Mary Ellen Rogan mrogan@nypl.org is Project Manager with the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts .

News of Roundtable Members

This is a relatively new section in *Performance!* Please pass along information to let others know of your changes.

Carol Jacobs, the archivist for the Cleveland Orchestra, has announced her retirement. She started work as the orchestra's archivist in 1990.

Editor's Corner

A belated issue of the newsletter

This issue of *Performance!* is coming to you later than usual. Your editor intends to get back on course with the next issue.

The Next Issue

The Winter/Spring issue should 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 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.

This belated Issue Initially Distributed Electronically on January 31, 2007