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Poster: All the World's a Stage: The Representation of Performance in the Archive

Abstract: This poster investigates how performance is represented in archives and how the changing context of the performance is captured in archival arrangement and description. There is a lack of research in how archives address performance records. I have addressed this gap in the literature and have made recommendations on how to further such investigation.

Résumé: Cette affiche examine comment la performance est représentée dans les archives et comment le contexte changeant de la performance est capturé dans l'arrangement et la description archivistique. Il existe une lacune dans la recherche sur la façon de documenter la performance. J'ai comblé cette lacune dans la littérature et émis des recommandations pour approfondir la question.

Performing arts archives are unique organizations with a specific focus of documenting live performances. I have conducted a systematic literature review on how performance is represented in archives and how, if at all, the changing context of the performance is captured in the arrangement and description of the records. Specifically, I have examined how the records in the archives represent the performance; how the changing nature of performance affects description and representation in the archive; and how archives arrange and describe these materials.

Performing arts can be defined in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this study, I limited the type of performance to be investigated. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of

performing arts is, “forms of creative activity that are performed in front of an audience, such as drama, music, and dance” (n.d., “Performing arts,” para.1). I used this definition to limit my investigation to archives and special collections with a focus on performed drama, music and dance.

There are many different perspectives and possible topics in the library and information science domain about performing arts. There has been some discussion about the different formats of records that are used to represent performance in the archives since, “[i]n performing arts archives and libraries, traditional sources are complemented by materials specific to the performing arts: for example, programs, playbills, posters, promptbooks, stage models, stage plans, marionettes, costumes, published and unpublished libretti, and scores” (Marini 2007, 13). These discussions examine if these multimedia records adequately document the performance. A common theme in the literature is that these multimedia records act as a surrogate for the performance. Their purpose is to preserve the records produced from the live event and not to capture and contain the performance itself.

Another issue surrounding performing arts archives in the changing nature of performance. Performance is, by nature, fluid and the context of performance is always in flux. Abbott, Jones and Ross (2009) raised the following questions, “If the significant property of performance is its transience, are all attempts to archive performance futile? Are we trying to capture something at the very point at which it slips away?” (166). How archives address this issue is an unresolved concern for artists, archivists, and researchers. Collaboration between these groups may help create the best possible performance records.

There has been some research done about the representation of live performances in library collections. Le Boeuf and Miller (2005) discuss the ability to catalogue performance using the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR). They state that although there is no reference to theatre in chapter 21 of the AACR2, there is some room to document a performance using specific fields. Le Boeuf and Miller (2005) argue that the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) model may be a more suitable framework for cataloguing performance art. This article does not discuss archival standards in the arrangement and description of the performing arts. The Rules of Archival Description (RAD) briefly addresses multimedia records in its multiple media fonds and moving images chapters. However, performing arts records are not clearly referenced in these chapters.

Although there is research about performance and library cataloguing standards, there is little information about performance and archival standards. Although RAD addresses the description of multimedia records, there is a need for furthering understanding on how these multimedia records adequately document the performance they are a surrogate for. There is a lack of research in regards to performance and archival arrangement and description. Many archives have published content descriptions of the performing arts collections, however, they contain little, if any, information about the arrangement and description of the material. I have addressed this gap in the literature through a systematic literature review, identifying, analyzing and synthesizing the literature available on the topic, and contributing to calls and recommendations on how to further such investigation.

References

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