

Old Dominion University Libraries



Newsletter

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Introducing Laura Y. Brown

I met Laura Brown one morning in the quiet of the Diehn Composers Room Seminar Room. She had agreed to talk to me about herself and her new role as Music Cataloger at Old Dominion University. Laura has the reticence of one heavily influenced by the romance of the South. She loved her time at the University of Southern Mississippi at Hattiesburg, she said, because "it was a genteel place, very polite." However, she welcomed doing this article, to associate a human face and a set of professional ideals with Music Collections.



We talked first about her experience with music. Like a great many people, Laura started piano lessons at the age of 5 or 6, at the Arrowood Academy in Norfolk. Laura had a full range of experiences with lessons. She had them at home at one point, took piano at St. Margaret's in Tappahannock, Va., and again

had lessons from Mrs. Simon in Newport News, Va. "Everybody took from Mrs. Simon," Laura acknowledged. In those early years, she both played and composed music by ear, having really fine aural memory. Unlike many people who start young, however, Laura continued her piano at Hollins College in Roanoke, Va. Her parents were solidly behind her learning to play and encouraged it. Laura has a piano at home and still plays.

I asked Laura what kind of music she enjoys. Classical and jazz mostly, she told me, but from there she took off unexpectedly in the direction of librarianship and creating entries in the library's catalog. Laura loves to learn about music. She is passionate about it, in fact. Liner notes for her are not simply a source of information for her library catalog entries. They are a textbook in her continuing music education, and as such a source of intellectual pleasure. She fairly bubbled over at how interesting the periods of music history were, how close the parallels were with the history of literature (she did a Masters' of English at Old Dominion a few years ago), how much she wished

the interconnectivity of the arts had been a specific part of her undergraduate education. All this information is critical for a good entry in the library catalog.

I encouraged her to talk a bit more about cataloging – specifically, how she thought music cataloging was different from cataloging textual materials. She said that cataloging music deals much more with physical form than with pure subject. When you catalog a book, you summarize what it's about with subject headings. You do that with music, too, but you have a whole extra dimension to think about. This is a work for piano and violin, that one is for a trio and this other one is a sound recording of a collection of works that were originally separate.

Laura doesn't just capture the subject with her cataloging, she also captures performance. It is a much richer representation of recordings and scores than most people imagine. How would you find Enrico Caruso singing "Vesti la giubba"? You remember that your grandfather had that recording on a Victor Red Seal 78 RPM record, and you'd like to hear it again. You don't remember, though, that this is from Leoncavallo's opera *I Pagliacci*, and maybe you really can't recall how to spell "giubba." So you go to the Old Dominion University Libraries catalog and type in the word "Caruso" and get 77 hits. Discouraged by the big number, you try "Caruso, Enrico," and get 26 hits. None of the hits has anything that looks like your title. In some libraries that don't make detailed entries in their catalogs, you'd just go home and try to remember how Caruso sounded. But here, try typing in just the word "Vesti," and several recordings appear to choose from! You can only get that kind of complete information when a music cataloger like Laura has gone the extra mile to provide the access.

When I asked how she thought cataloging had changed since she started, she dismissed the idea that much had changed at all. It isn't cataloging that has changed, it's public access. On-line public catalogs are great, and lend themselves to sophisticated search techniques. But Laura misses the browsing potential that simple subject cards in a card catalog allowed.

Laura views better access to information as the core importance of her work here. In her time in the English Literature program at Old Dominion, it became clear to her that students needed desperately the sort of help locating information that a good, clean, detailed catalog record affords. Even if Laura seems caught up in the music, in the end she is completely patron-centered.

Laura freely admits that her intellectual pleasures are the joys of an academic father's daughter, who had to stay quiet at home. It is nonetheless clear that Laura has an expansive approach to living. She is personally an avid traveler, having visited 11 European countries, Morocco, Costa Rica, Brazil and Japan. Panama is shortly to be added to the list. She also demonstrates deep compassion for animals, supporting rescued farm animals in New York and rescued circus elephants in Tennessee.

It is a joy to welcome Laura Y. Brown as the newest member of the Diehn Composers Room Team. If you have a question or comment for Laura, she can be reached at lybrown@odu.edu, or at 757-683-4187.

Exhibits at the Diehn Composers Room

As part of the University Libraries, the core mission at the Diehn Composers Room is to meet the instructional, research and public service needs of the musical community. Like many music libraries, we provide listening equipment, scores, recordings, books, even manuscript materials to researchers. But we also have exhibit space, which gives us a chance to be creative and to bring to public attention the materials from our Special Collections. Many libraries have such spaces, and put together beautiful displays of materials that are marvelous to behold. Yet, not all such exhibits have a teaching function.

Here, they do.

Every exhibit we put on in the Diehn Composers Room has a pedagogical goal. We view exhibit space as an extension of classroom space, and we think of exhibits as supplements to classroom instruction. Our exhibit space indeed is not limited to the four cases in 189 Diehn Fine and Performing Arts Center, but rather extends to the World Wide Web. Every print exhibit here has a Web version, with links and references to a host of reputable information portals and websites. We take the same care to do the research and to gather materials as if we were preparing a paper for a national conference or teaching a seminar.

This past fall's exhibit at the Diehn Composers Room was no exception. Entitled "The Art and Business of Composition," the exhibit illustrated three aspects of a

composer's professional life: the art of composition itself, the art of printing music and the business of getting published and getting paid.



Just like anybody else, music composers need to make a living. We examined how they do their creative work by letting them speak, through their oral histories and through the sketchbooks and drafts of two of our own composers, Allan Blank and Adolphus Hailstork. Because the final product of their labors is the

published work, we also highlighted the history of music printing. The goals of early printing may have been to make music more widely accessible, but the artistry involved in later printing techniques is even today an important selling point for music. Finally, in the business section, we looked at the six different intellectual property rights that composers can make money from. We also provided a very simplified approach to protecting those rights, finding a publisher, signing a good agreement with them and becoming a member of a performing rights organization. After all, with worldwide sales of physical and digital music recordings at over \$33 billion last year, according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), it pays to be informed! (<http://www.ifpi.org/site-content/library/worldsales2005-ff.pdf>)

The print exhibit was on display from August 29 through November 28, 2006, in 189 Diehn Fine and Performing Arts Center. The Web exhibit will continue to be available at http://www.lib.odu.edu/musiclib/exhibits/art_business/index.htm. The new exhibit, "Allan Blank: A New Look at the Creative Process," will be available from December 7, 2006, until February 13, 2007. For more information about these exhibits, please contact Jay E. Moore, Librarian Archivist for Music Collections, at 757-683-4175, or at jemoore@odu.edu.

Processing Archival Material

In the first issue of this newsletter, we wrote about the preservation of sound. Sound recorded in analog format should be preserved in analog format on archival quality ¼-inch tape and kept in a cool, dark, low-humidity area. We are institutionally committed to preserving the recordings entrusted to us, while making them digitally accessible to the public.

In this issue, we continue our preservation theme with the care of text and music written on paper. The variety of material on paper in the Music Collections is staggering – everything from scraps of paper and old advertisements upon which a composer has scribbled a melody or chord progression to full-size conductors’ scores. Those scraps of paper are valuable for researchers because of their evidentiary worth — that is, because they constitute in many cases the only record of a composer’s creative process. Since no composer creates in exactly the same way as any other, such evidence can shed light on no less than the creative impulse itself. It is important to preserve this material.

The Problem with Paper

Paper presents challenges to the archivist, particularly in an archival collection such as ours that stores mixed media. We house in one space several different kinds of material: photographs; sound recordings on tape, vinyl and shellac; oil on canvas paintings; and paper. Photographs (particularly color photographs), records, tapes and CDs all enjoy temperatures around the freezing mark with around 30% humidity. However, according to a technical report for the National Information Standards Institute (NISO), recommendations for paper storage are for a maximum temperature of 65°F with a maximum relative humidity of 50%. Temperatures lower than 35°F and relative humidity lower than 30% make paper brittle and susceptible to breaks and tears. Even worse for paper than temperatures and humidity that are too low or high are wide swings in temperature and humidity. (A copy of the technical report is available from Techstreet.com at http://www.techstreet.com/cgi-bin/detail?product_id=52641.) In order to store photographs, phonograph records, magnetic media and paper together in the same space, we have to find a happy medium for our storage temperature and relative humidity that does not vary much from winter to summer. For the Diehn Composers Room, that would be temperatures below 68°F and relative humidity below 40%. Maintaining constant temperature and relative humidity levels best suited for this variety of materials is not always easy in Virginia summers, but we enjoy good cooperation from the staff at Facilities Management.

Another challenge is acidity. Paper made before about 1810 was made with a large percentage of cotton and linen rags, and in many cases looks as good and strong today as it did when it was made. However, after that date, increased use of wood pulp, machine processing and chemical additives greatly contributed to the acidification of paper. Additives such as chlorine and alum (aluminum sulphate), both present in paper by the late 1800s, are themselves acids and react to humidity in the air, causing paper to deteriorate. Paper made in the 1960s, 70s and 80s,

the decades most heavily represented in our collections, was particularly acidic. We have all seen newspapers only 20 years old that are seriously yellowed and falling apart at creases and edges – that is the effect of acid. Improvements in paper manufacture since the 1980s mean greatly improved paper quality and pH balance. The question remains, however: what to do with the older acidic materials in the Diehn collections?

Preserving Paper for the Future

Standard archival processing always includes a preservation step. When we process paper materials, we take pains to test them for pH balance with a special testing pen and to store them flat. Highly acidic materials are



Testing pH of paper documents

often inserted in pH-neutral tissue paper envelopes, and very highly acidic materials are housed in Mylar® sleeves, in order to isolate them completely from other documents. Fragile documents that require extra support are also housed in Mylar®. We try not to store more than 10 sheets of paper in a folder, to make certain they stay flat. To protect the edges, we put paper in storage that is appropriate for its size. If an appropriately-sized folder is not commercially available, we make it ourselves.

We also buy boxes and folders made with calcium carbonate, which neutralizes acid, and with lignin-free card stock. Lignin is a complicated molecule that is unstable and becomes very acidic with age. It is present in trees and therefore in so-called groundwood paper, paper made from grinding wood into pulp rather than cooking it to pulp with heat, pressure and chemicals before refining.

As a final step in the preservation process, we make sure



Staples, which may rust, are removed.

that all metal, all staples, all clips and all plastic are removed from the materials. Metal clips may rust and stain paper. Clips of any sort, plastic or otherwise, bend and damage paper. Any metal or plastic spiral bindings are removed because of the danger that they will release gases that will discolor the paper, or otherwise damage it physically.



Plastic bindings are removed to preserve paper appearance.

Many sources of information on paper making and archival treatment of paper are available either in print or on the Web. One of the best sources is Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler's *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: SAA, 1993).

A very comprehensive print source from the Northeast Document Center, *Preservation of Library and Archival Materials: A Manual*, is also available on-line at <http://www.nedcc.org/plam3/tofc.htm>.

Editor: Jay E. Moore, Librarian Archivist for Music Collections
Diehn Composers Room
Web page: <http://www.lib.odu.edu/musiclib/index.htm>

Finally, both the Library of Congress and the Northeast Document Center provide guidelines tailored to the maintenance of a family collection. These guidelines are available at <http://www.loc.gov/preserv/care/paper.html> and <http://www.nedcc.org/leaflets/fmlycol.htm>.

The preservation step is only part of archival processing, of course, but it is the most important one for future generations of musicologists and performers. The procedures are time consuming, but they are necessary to put off as long as possible the inevitable loss of these original records created on acidic paper.