



The SAA Performing Arts Roundtable encourages the exchange of information on historical and contemporary documentation of music, dance, theater, motion pictures, and other performance media.

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

**Message**      **Page 3**  
from the  
Co-Chair

**Wake Forest's "Hidden" Treasure: the Max and Gertrude Hoffmann Papers**

**Cataloging the Martin Pakledinaz Collection**

**Daytime Drama: the Clara, Lu 'n' Em Collection at NU Archives**

**News**      **Page 20**

# Performance!

WINTER 2014

NEWSLETTER OF THE SAA  
PERFORMING ARTS ROUNDTABLE



# Performance!

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Cover: Max and Gertrude Hoffmann, circa 1955,  
 Max and Gertrude Hoffmann Photograph  
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Page 2: Harry Houdini Papers and Magic  
 Collection, Harry Ransom Center, The  
 University of Texas at Austin

Page 5: Gertrude Hoffman portrait, James &  
 Bushnell (Seattle, Washington), Max and  
 Gertrude Hoffmann Photograph Collection,  
 Special Collections & Archives, Z. Smith  
 Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University;  
*Salome*, [New Orchestration], Max and  
 Gertrude Hoffmann Music Manuscript  
 Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Z.  
 Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University



Portion of advertisement for engagement of Maskelyne & Cook at Egyptian Hall (1873), pasted in Harry Houdini's Magician's scrapbook

Page 3: Charles Weidman, Gertrude Hoffmann, Ruth St. Denis, Doris Humphrey, and José Limón, circa 1950, Max and Gertrude Hoffmann Photograph Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University

Page 4: Max and Gertrude Hoffmann Photograph Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University

Pages 6-9: Max and Gertrude Hoffmann Photograph Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University

Pages 10-15: Costume sketches, courtesy of the Estate of Martin Pakledinaz; photograph of Martin Pakledinaz (page 14) by Carol Rosegg

Pages 16-19: Records of Clara, Lu 'n' Em, Northwestern University Archives

Page 20: Lantern slide (SPEC.TRI.JOR.3.1.3 ), Joel E. Rubin Collection, Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute, Ohio State University; Costume sketch

(SPEC.DD.DES.412), Daphne Dare Collection, Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute, Ohio State University

Page 21: Exhibit logo, courtesy of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum Library and Archives; *Letter to the World* production photograph, Fred Fehl Dance Collection, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

# Message From the Co-Chair

Happy New Year PAR members!

I've had enough of the bitter cold here in Ohio, and can't wait for some warmer weather. With summer, of course, comes the SAA Annual Meeting and the Steering Committee, and I will soon begin planning the Roundtable's business meeting. We have a few ideas but would welcome any suggestions or feedback from those of you who attended previous meetings.

Did you like last year's presentations? Or would you prefer an informal session with one or two guest speakers? I heard from several people about how much they enjoyed the tour we took of the Historic New Orleans Collection, and we will very likely set up another tour at a Washington, D.C. institution this year. Four years ago, the last time we were in Washington, the Roundtable toured the Library of Congress' Music Division.

The other subject of business in the months ahead is the election of new officers to the Roundtable. Rachel will continue as Co-Chair, and the open positions will include Co-chair, as well as opportunities for two others to join as Steering Committee members. We also anticipate several appointed positions opening up, specifically those involving the newsletter. In addition, we will be actively looking for a Web Liaison to help us to improve the look of our microsite within SAA's Web site.

So start thinking about what role you'd like—this is an easy way to get more involved in the profession! While my term will be up, you can expect me to remain involved in the roundtable.

Enjoy the rest of the newsletter!

*Stasia Karel  
Co-Chair of the Performing Arts Roundtable*



Gertrude Hoffman (second from left) and other notable choreographers at the house of Charles Weidman (far left)

## Hidden Treasure: The Max and Gertrude Hoffmann Collection at Wake Forest University

by Megan Mulder

Megan Mulder is Special Collections Librarian at Wake Forest University's Z. Smith Reynolds Library. She received her M.S.L.S. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an M.A. in English from the University of Virginia.

Adolph Eugene Victor Maximillian Hoffmann was born in Gnesen, Poland in 1873. He immigrated to the United States as a young man and, after wisely shortening his name to Max Hoffmann, began a successful career as a composer, conductor, and arranger for theatrical productions of various types. His wife, dancer and

choreographer, Gertrude Hoffmann, was born Catherine (Kitty) Gertrude Hayes in San Francisco in 1885. The couple likely met when Max composed the ragtime score for a 1901 production of George Ade's *The Night of the Fourth*, in which Gertrude made her New York stage debut. Their son, Max Jr., was born in 1902.

Max Hoffmann originally worked as a ragtime arranger and generally is considered to be "the first white man" to create rag arrangements (Berlin, Edward. *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*, page 65). Oxford Music Online further characterizes Hoffmann and his work as "a model of scoring for the nascent piano ragtime industry...[which] helped popularize the work of...ragtime pioneers." Hoffmann served as an arranger and conductor in vaudeville and also composed music for many Broadway productions. He wrote for acts such as the Rogers Brothers, as well as for the theatrical producers, Klaw & Erlanger. One of his best known Broadway scores was for *A Parisian Model* (1906). He would become famous for the song, *The Gertrude Hoffmann Glide*, and served as the composer and musical director for his wife and her dancing troupes, which became known as the Gertrude Hoffman Girls.

Gertrude Hoffmann (often billed as Gertrude Hoffman) had a flourishing career in vaudeville during the first decades of the 20th century as a dancer, mimic, and choreographer. Early on, she worked for Oscar and William Hammerstein, both as a performer and a rehearsal director. She also appeared as a featured dancer with the popular star Anna Held in *A Parisian Model*, produced by Held's lover, the impresario Florenz Ziegfeld.



Gertrude would work extensively for other notable Broadway producers, including the Shubert Brothers and Sam Harris. In July 1908, she gained notoriety for performing an imitation of Maud Allan's *Salomé* dance at the Hammerstein Paradise Roof Garden, the first performance of this rather scandalous piece in the United States. A repeat performance in 1909 resulted in Gertrude's arrest for indecency. Her court appearance featured a standing-room only crowd because, as the *New York Times* (28 July 1909) observed: "The news had gone forth that Miss Hoffmann would probably appear in court in her flimsy dancing costume." But the disappointed spectators "left hurriedly when Miss Hoffmann appeared in an automobile costume of purple, which reached from head to foot." In the end the judge ruled that

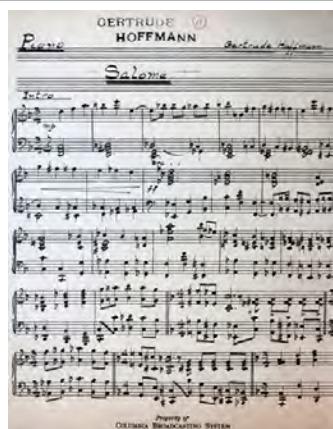
Gertrude would have to perform in "tights that came down well below her knees" and that a (female) probation officer would be stationed in her dressing room nightly to ensure that she complied.

Her *Salomé* fame won Gertrude a job as a featured performer in a variety of shows, including the touring company of a popular vaudeville revue, *The Mimic World*. During this period, she



Left: An early studio photograph of Gertrude Hofmann

Bottom: Page from *Salome* piano score



also would introduce American audiences to Russian ballet ahead of the 1916 tour of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*. After attending a performance of the revolutionary company during a trip to Paris, she collaborated with Morris Gest to bring a troupe of Russian dancers to the United States. Gertrude managed the group, which performed the pieces she choreographed (including *Cléopâtre*, *Les Sylphides*, and *Scheherazade*) before appreciative crowds in New York. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* (10 September 1911) commented: "This accomplish-



Gertrude Hoffmann and an unidentified male dancer, possibly in costume for *Scheherazade*

ment has placed Miss Hoffmann high in the ranks of women theatrical managers."

Gertrude continued to maintain a successful performing career into the 1910s. Even when she was very young, however, she often had doubled as a stage manager and/or choreographer. By the 1920s, her focus had begun to shift towards the management of her own dance troupe, the Gertrude Hoffmann Girls. Beginning with a group of eighteen girls (some as young as sixteen), Gertrude developed a company that could perform a wide variety of styles.

The Hoffman Girls were clearly a family

affair. Gertrude choreographed all of the dance numbers for the troupe. Max (who apparently was known as "Dad" to many of the girls) composed and conducted much of the music that served as an accompaniment to their performances. Max Jr., who had his own career as a musician and performer, also was involved in the management of the company. By 1922, the Hoffman Girls had become extremely successful, appearing in the Ziegfeld Follies and other vaudeville shows.

Their performances reflected Gertrude's own versatile and eclectic style as a choreographer. A reviewer in the *New York Times* (5 July 1925) remarked that the troupe managed to combine the seemingly incompatible influences of Isadora Duncan and John Tiller. The Gertrude Hoffman Girls' precision line format was enlivened with acrobatics, tap dance, rope and rigging work, and classical ballet.

In their heyday during the 1920s and 1930s, Gertrude had over thirty Hoffman Girls troupes performing simultaneously in Europe and the United States. They were especially popular in London and Paris, where they appeared at the Hippodrome, the Moulin Rouge, and many other famous venues.

The success of the Hoffman Girls continued unabated until the outbreak of the Second World War forced Gertrude and her dancers to leave Europe. Max Jr. (who had married the actress Norma Terris) died suddenly in 1945. Shortly thereafter it appears that Max and Gertrude moved to Hollywood.

Max worked as an arranger for movie studios. Gertrude may have operated a dance studio in California, and it is possible that she appeared in movies as a character actress (another actress with the name



Gertrude W. Hoffmann was also working during the same period). Max died in California in 1963, followed by Gertrude in 1966.

Not long after Gertrude Hoffmann's death, a young theatre professor from Wake Forest University came across a trunk full of music manuscripts and other memorabilia in a Los Angeles antique shop. He purchased the materials and turned them over to what was then the Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection at Wake Forest's library. The collection was accessioned but only minimally processed, likely because it was out of scope for what was then the collecting focus. It remained in storage for several decades until the Special Collections staff

undertook a hidden collections inventory in 2009.

Fortunately, the mysterious trunk came to light shortly after the hiring of graduate assistant Rachel Ernst, a Wake Forest M.A. candidate with considerable expertise in music and theatre history. Rachel created a [complete finding aid](#) for the collection and provided metadata for the [music manuscripts](#), which, along with [photographs](#) from the collection,

Above:  
The Hoffman Girls perform an aerial acrobatics dance on board a luxury ocean liner, circa 1925

Left:  
The Hoffman Girls perform their famous Spear Dance



Right: A Hoffmann Girls troupe in Hollywood, 1933

Below: A Hoffmann dancer in costume for a satirical revue of "prominent world characters done in dance"



are now available online.

The Gertrude and Max Hoffmann Papers provide a look into the life of these two influential artists from the first half of the twentieth century. The collection includes Max Hoffmann's music library and many annotated manuscripts of his own compositions and arrangements.

In addition to the music manuscripts, the collection includes a great deal of material documenting Gertrude Hoffmann's career, especially her management of the Gertrude Hoffmann Girls.

Gertrude Hoffmann was one of the first female dance directors in the United States, and her collection of newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, photographs, music, notes, and correspondence gives a detailed look into the day-to-day management of her company and the staging of its productions. The collection makes clear that Gertrude was a skilled manager who combined a genuine love of the artistry of dance with a keen business sense. Her notebooks contain extensive information

about the staging and choreography of her productions, as well as some pointed observations, often directed at theatre managers ("Why managers buy something and then set out to ruin same, is beyond my ability to understand...").



Personal correspondence and other memorabilia give some insight into the Hoffmans' poorly documented later years. An intriguing mystery in the collection is a file which contains three lengthy letters, addressed affectionately to "Eric and Mildred Stuewe," from Communist Labor Party founder Edgar Owens.

The collection also includes original advertising posters, many of them quite large, and photographs,

chiefly of Gertrude Hoffmann and of the Gertrude Hoffman Girls.

The Special Collections and Archives at Wake Forest University now has a growing collection of materials documenting American performing arts of the 20th century. And after a long hiatus, the Max and Gertrude Hoffmann Papers again have a starring role.



Gertrude Hoffmann,  
circa 1925

## The Accidental Archivist: Cataloging the Martin Pakledinaz Collection

*An Interview with Costumer/Archivist Valerie Marcus Ramshur by Tiffany Nixon*

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 Valerie Marcus Ramshur is a costume designer in New York City. As an associate of Martin Pakledinaz, Valerie was involved with Martin during the last year of his life and was instrumental in preparing his estate. Roundabout Theatre Company's archivist Tiffany Nixon spoke with Valerie about working with the iconic Pakledinaz and the archiving process involved in organizing his collection and nearly 4,000 costume sketches.  
 .....

**Today is December 12, 2013, and I'm here with Valerie Marcus Ramshur. Thanks for coming to talk about Martin. Would you introduce yourself, some background on your work with Martin, and the archival work you undertook toward the end of his life?**



I'm a costume designer as well as an associate costume designer in New York City. I first met Martin Pakledinaz in 1998. He was a professor of mine at NYU's Graduate Program for Design for Stage and Film. Several years later when I graduated, I went to work with him in his studio for one year—it was a terrible year! Martin could be tricky to work for. One moment he was demanding, berating, and frustrating. The next moment warm, funny, and encouraging. It was [an] extremely intense environment and high stakes, high-pressure work that could reduce one to tears. However, in the midst of this emotional turmoil, it was also one of the greatest years because he was truly a design genius. Being in his presence, one was allowed to glimpse the depth of the craft. One learned theatre design on a very deep practical level. Ranging from fabric swatching, sketch rendering, garment fittings, and tailoring. One witnessed the master at work in the art of working with actors in a fitting—the discovery of character development. Nobody analyzed scripts like he did. He was constantly questioning and collaborating with everyone on the projects, from the director and the creative team all the way down to craftspeople and everyone in between. On a purely artistic level, working with him was like another year of graduate school. Grueling but deeply fulfilling.

After that year, we stayed very good friends. I went on to develop my own work as a designer and assist other designers, but he was very kind to me. When I was pregnant with my son and unable to run around town,

he would hire me to do special research projects on productions. I was able sit in one place and research in his amazing studio library or online, or as I call it “turning over stones”—we remained friends throughout the years.

In 2011, Martin was diagnosed with brain cancer. He was in the midst of chemotherapy and had had two surgeries in an eight-month time span. I was called in to be a theatrical project manager—to basically take care of the studio and the production teams on the myriad of work going on all at once. In the sixteen months Martin had from diagnosis to death, he worked on five Broadway shows, two operas, a ballet, and a film.

There was a huge amount of work to be done within a very busy studio. He had an amazing studio crew of dedicated and loyal assistants, but not many folks outside the studio and a very small circle of friends knew what was going on. I realized that I was also brought in to take care of Martin and quickly added the title of personal assistant and caretaker to my title. For nearly eight months we shuttled between chemotherapy, physical therapy, doctor’s appointments, and creating the costumes for these productions. We travelled to San Francisco for technical rehearsals on San Francisco Ballet’s production of *Don Quixote*. We had several opening nights and award season events to attend—while finishing the Broadway production of *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, which turned out to be his last show.

**Did Martin know that *Nice Work...*would be his last?**



Penelope at Spanish Party for *The Coconuts* (1989), Arena Stage, Washington, D.C.

No, he didn’t. He remained optimistic. He really did have an incredible amount of hope and humor. He thought at least another year. Martin was always someone who could do several jobs at once, but it became very clear where he could only do two jobs and even that second job was one too many. He just wanted to keep on doing “the work.” The hope was that he would last through 2012, but he died the summer of 2012. He had been nominated for a Tony and Drama Desk for *Nice Work*, and we were just trying to get him through awards season. Once Tony night passed, Martin started hospice the following day and died three weeks later. Only at that point [starting hospice care] were we finally able to tell people how sick Martin actually was. People were very surprised because they didn’t know how sick he was and actually even all of us were surprised, as we



Naraboth in  
*Salome* (1995),  
Santa Fe Opera

hadn't processed what his sickness meant. I suppose we all held out an incredible amount of hope. In the meantime, while this was happening, we started the process of cleaning out his apartment and studio.

**Did Martin have resource/reference materials spread throughout the apartment as well as the studio?**

No, his home was a home—there were no work materials there. There might have been one pad of paper and some pencils but nothing else—it was all at the studio. We had moved him to a new apartment closer to his studio so he could walk there. Every day he would walk to the studio, which was absolutely filled with research materials,

picture collections, books, tons of art work...

**And his studio was located on 39th Street up until the end of his life?**

Yes, but a few months before he passed away we had moved into a smaller office at the Tricorne costume shop to work on both *Chaplin* and the national tour of *Anything Goes*. The task of cleaning out the "big" studio was an incredible journey through his life and career. That I was blessed to clean out the studio with him there. Martin would lie on the couch, and I would show him various items and get his opinion as to what should happen with the various items. He had vintage garments, jewelry, fabrics, and an incredible collection of books, and it was a process of who got what. Vintage jewelry and accessories went to Helen Uffner Vintage Clothing, an incredible vintage rental house, an archive in and of itself of period garments. Many garments and jewelry went to NYU where Martin had taught. A huge number of books went to NYU and TDF costume collection to start a research library.

**Was Martin thinking in terms of his legacy at this point, or was he just interested in giving back to the community, knowing there would be people who would appreciate and use the items?**

I don't think that Martin fully understood his legacy or fully realized his contribution to our national performing arts. Community was extremely important to Martin; there was the theatre, dance, and opera community, of which he was so fond. There was also the community of Martin's family, friends, students, and young designers. All benefited from Martin and his constant generosity. He was always donating sketches, giving of his time to various charities and educational programs; he had so much knowledge to share up to the end. He was incredibly generous with his experiences and information, in a way that a lot of designers simply aren't. That's what made him a great teacher. He didn't start out as a good teacher, but he definitely became one. He was

passionate about letting the next generation in on the “secrets” of the craft.

Martin kept everything from his early college days through his last productions. He kept every opening night gift (which went to the Broadway Cares Equity Fights AIDS flea market auction), his correspondence, playbills, and most of his sketches. I learned later that he had nearly 4,000 sketches. They were in the back of his loft collecting dust. He had a portfolio that never got opened and never updated his resume. He got to a point where everyone knew who he was, [was] hired without showing his portfolio, and then, when the project was over, he would place the show binder on the shelf with the rest of the productions and move on to the next project.

**I know when I met him and borrowed sketches from the Roundabout Theatre shows, he pulled off the folders and rifled through the sketches—he wasn’t precious about them.**

No, the sketches weren’t precious at all. He gave away so many sketches over the years to Broadway Cares auctions, various actors, directors, and choreographers. He often gifted sketches to our community of costume makers and craftspeople, those who made the garments. He was always saying, “No one is going to want those (the sketches), do whatever with them, just make sure they don’t end up in the garbage—actually, no, go ahead and throw them away!” He never seemed to have had an attachment. It is important to note with designers that it is very easy ... [to] fall in love with their own work. When that happens, the sketch takes on preciousness and becomes this sacred document you cannot rework or change. Conversely, one can treat the sketch like the working document it is. Like a recipe card...

**What a great metaphor.**

I often think costume sketches at their best are recipe cards—you know: two yards of silk, three yards of pearls...it is like following a recipe or a good map on the journey of the production. It is what we have in costume design the tool to aid in the evolution of character and

story. I think Martin felt that way, too. So, the funny part is that when Martin passed away, I was left with nearly 4,000 “recipes,” but I soon realized they had transformed into precious pieces of art! I sat on them like a mother hen wondering what I should do with them. None of them had been cataloged, nothing had been scanned. There was never time for that. Martin would not have paid someone to inventory sketches when their time would be better-spent swatching or shopping shows. The honor was left to me to work with his family [to] figure out what to do with his amazing collection.

Martin had left me on salary for six months to close up the studio and to help his family set up the estate. I started first by creating a resume, which took a month and a half. There was no complete resume and to be frank even now I’m not sure I have a complete resume for him. I created the resume so that I could better understand the sketches I was working with.



English Lord in *The Pirate Queen* (2007), Hilton Theatre and Ford Center for the Performing Arts, Broadway



Portrait of Martin Pakledinaz

### **How did you build the resume? Were there legacy documents to use?**

Well, I became a bit of a data detective. I had a few old files with out-of-date resumes and bios from the first twenty years of his career that I could piece together. I also found various Internet databases helpful such as [Playbill Vault](#) and the [Lortel Archives](#). Additionally, I relied on the growing number of cultural institutions that now have functioning online archives. So for instance, I knew that he designed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a ballet, opera, and a play, but the challenge was in figuring out which was which. The sketch file would just be labeled "Midsummer," and through process of elimination and knowing various subtle design choices that would have to be made to fit the genre that the piece was performed in, I was able to determine shows. So my design experience and my growing archival passion were working overtime.

### **So there were no additional documents with the sketches to help with identification?**

No, and not all sketches were even labeled! So for the next six months, I felt like Nancy Drew. I had a picture of Martin pinned to the bulletin board in the office, and I would "talk" with him. Martin would "tell" me that I needed to brush up on my opera, or I had to think harder to remember my ballets. I went a little insane with those 4,000 sketches. The extraordinary part was that these sketches went back to his undergraduate work at Wayne State University in Michigan to his final sketches for *Nice Work*—and everything in between. The collection is not complete by any means—not everything is there and not all shows are complete—but to see one designer's huge body of work, to see how his rendering technique had changed, how his approach to a production through his sketches had developed over the years was a real revelation. In many ways it was like another year of graduate studies—studying Martin Pakledinaz.

I feel so lucky to have worked with this collection. This designer who was fearless in his need to constantly question the work

and dig deeper every time. As a student it was inspiring, as a fellow designer it was exciting. When I see these sketches, I wonder how they all came from one man's mind. He was the master of ballpoint pen. To me, some of the most "valuable" sketches—and not from a monetary standpoint—are the simple ballpoint sketches. Some that come to mind are *The Duchess of Malfi* that he did at the Guthrie in the 1980s, they are just ballpoint pen and a bit of color—they are just breathtaking. He had a mastery of the art, but it wasn't something that came easily for him—he struggled with artwork—so the fact that he was less attached to them was interesting. He pored over them—staying up late at night, holidays and weekends just drawing and drawing—and he could feel at times quite insecure about them.

### **When you were going through these sketches, you were creating a spreadsheet or inventory of the items?**

Yes, once I had the working resume, I was able then to break into genres—Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional, dance, opera—and then listed the productions and how many color and black and white sketches were present. I started scanning the color sketches, and then we had the estate appraised.

### **What was that process?**

It was fascinating. The appraiser took my paperwork, and we worked in the same room for a week—he counted, did some mysterious calculations, and would ask me information about leading actors and productions, and to the best of my knowledge I provided that information for him. We had different terminology for sketches—for instance, he would refer to a black and white sketch as an "unpainted sketch"—because he was approaching the collection from [the] viewpoint of a certain resale market. But I knew that the black and white sketches were generally never meant to be painted as Martin would simply take the sketch to the costume shop and pick out fabric—the sketch didn't need to be painted because the fabric was used instead.

**After his death, did you hear from theatre repositories with an interest in the collection?**

The family estate got more calls. I got a few but not as many as I thought. There were legal issues that needed to be cleaned up and now, a year and half later, much of the physical estate is being sold.

**Your understanding and connection to these objects as artwork has prompted an interest in archives and special collections?**

As we cleaned out the big studio, we had hundreds of production "bibles." We call them bibles because they contain all the essential information that brings a production to life. We had so many of the bibles we didn't know what to do with them, so we gave them to the New York Public Library's Billy Rose Theatre Collection. A

year later, did I learn how valuable the bibles were when everyone started asking me what I had done with the bibles!

What started to happen was I became an accidental archivist. I came to realize there is a lot of

magic in these sketches, documents and garments. The spell was cast. I don't know if it was working for months with all those sketches and talking to a dead man, but the magical spell was cast! I am fascinated by, have become completely absorbed in, what it means to become an archivist and how to create special collections. I feel so strongly about [the] need

to preserve our theatre design history and bridge the divide between the practitioners and the academics. It seemed after meeting people in academia, in special collections, and meeting with collectors in my community of designers, there is a gap. We as practitioners would love to get our materials in the hands of interested people, and they in turn want to get their hands on our work, but there is no common dialog. We're too busy creating the work that "archiving" is unheard of, and when you do have down time between projects, there are so many other commitments with one's time, the sketches just go into the closet or underneath your bed...

For me, I have this need, drive, call it what you will, to find my place in the already blossoming performing arts archives community and explore what I can offer from my unique perspective—it's exciting.



**It is very exciting! It is such a natural marriage of two worlds—designers and archivists working together to fill those obvious gaps. Once a show comes down, a designer working with his/her archivist would have a very clear idea of the scope of the artistic body of work.**

Salome's Slave in *Salome* (1995), Santa Fe Opera

As designers we already spend a huge amount of our time researching. Research and digital detective work have always been my favorite part of the job. The

research, the artwork, the story telling—all of these elements are so compelling in the design process. The gift—if there is a gift to be found in this very sad experience for me personally and the huge loss to our theatre design community—has been to find new ways of looking at our work while exploring new ways to preserve the work we do.

## Daytime Drama: Tuning in Again to the First Radio Soap Opera

by Janet Olson

Janet Olson (M.A., History, Loyola University Chicago; Certified Archivist) has been Assistant University Archivist at Northwestern University since 1998. A longtime member of SAA, she has also held leadership roles in the Midwest Archives Conference and the Chicago Area Archivists.

An exhibit of material from the Northwestern University Archives' Clara, Lu 'n' Em Collection will be on display at the Deering Library through March 21, 2014.



Promotional flier sent by NBC to solicit sponsorship

From 1930 to 1946, the daily conversations of three small-town housewives—exchanged over the back fence or during a kitchen-table kaffee-klatsch—were overheard by thousands of listeners across the United States. These discussions, dealing with familiar issues of family and friends, sprinkled with timely references to national and world events, and delivered in a folksy tone layered with comical mispronunciations and malapropisms, caught the ears of a new audience: women listening to the radio as they did their daily housework. The format—soon to be known as “soap opera” because the shows were usually sponsored by manufacturers of soap and other household products—

became popular, and so did the three gossiping housewives who starred in the *Clara, Lu 'n' Em* show.

But the plot twist in this daytime drama happened to be that those rustic gals with their prosaic lives and sloppy grammar were portrayed by three accomplished alumnae of Northwestern University's School of Speech, who wrote every script, negotiated the complex world of sponsorships and contracts, and made numerous in-character promotional appearances. The Northwestern University Archives' *Clara, Lu 'n' Em* collection sheds light not only on this particular program, but also on an era when radio drama was still developing—a time in which homespun housewives had an appeal later superseded by steamier characters and plots, as the soap opera genre matured and tastes changed. The *Clara, Lu 'n' Em* materials include documents, scripts, posters, photographs, audio recordings, and artifacts recently received as a donation from “Em’s” family. This gift enhances the Archives’ already extensive holdings, which document Northwestern’s tradition of performing arts training; among them the papers of faculty and a star-studded cast of alumni.

### Meet Clara, Lu 'n' Em

Who were the Northwestern co-eds who gained fame channeling plain-spoken housewives from downstate Illinois? Louise Starkey (1905-1969), from Des Moines, Iowa, graduated from the Northwestern University School of Speech in 1927, Isobel Carothers (1900-1937),

also from Des Moines, and Helen King (1904-1970), born in California, but raised in Peoria, both had graduated in 1926. The three participated in several of the many drama and literary societies at Northwestern and were members of the Zeta Phi Eta communications sorority. To entertain their sorority sisters, the three would drop their collegiate sophistication and improvise humorous dialogues in the nasal twang characteristic of their relatives back home. They called themselves "Clara" (Louise), "Lu" (Isobel), and "Em" (Helen).

After graduation, they scattered across the country to pursue teaching or performing careers.

When all three ended up back in Evanston by 1930, they put an act together, resurrecting the characters that had so amused the Zeta Phi Etas at Northwestern, and chose radio as their medium. The first radio station they approached turned them down without an audition, commenting that there was no place for women's skits in radio. Next they tried WGN, Chicago's NBC affiliate. Asked to describe their act, they said, "We talk." The station manager asked what they talked about. When they replied, "Anything," he told them to talk about Rudy Vallee, which they did with such



charming chatter that they were offered a two-week trial on the local station. That test run was followed by a four-year contract, which, within a year, earned the *Clara, Lu 'n' Em* program a national audience on NBC stations.

Listeners soon became acquainted with the individual personalities of the girls—they were never called women—and with their families (although none of the family members were ever heard on radio). Clara Roach (Starkey) was bossy, organized, rather large, and a staunch Republican. She and her husband, Charley, a mechanic who owned his own garage, had two children, Herman and August. Lulu Casey (Carothers), widow of the late George, with one daughter, Florabelle, was scatterbrained, dim, and flighty. She considered herself a member of the "Social" Party. Emma Krueger (King)—disorganized, impractical, forgetful, and a diehard Democrat—was married to the hapless Ernest, who had trouble holding a job. Their six children were Junior, Esmeralda, Geraldine, Little Em, Archie, and Alvin. The three families shared a house in Peoria, which gave Clara, Lu, and Em ample opportunity to gossip and philosophize.

Top: Promotional photograph of Clara, Lu, and Em in character

Bottom: Zeta Phi Eta sorority sisters pictured in Northwestern University yearbook



Louise Starkey

Isobel Carothers

Helen King

Northwestern University *Syllabus* Yearbook, 1927

### Let's Join Those Lovable, Laughable Housewives...

*Clara, Lu 'n' Em* followed a now-familiar radio serial format. The announcer, Jean Paul King of the mellifluous

Right: Maurice Seymour portrait of announcer Jean Paul King

Below: Promotional jigsaw puzzle depicting Clara, Lu 'n' Em lunching on the steps of the United States Capitol



"radio voice," introduced the day's show with a plug for the sponsor's products. A few bars from the Hammond organ were followed by thirteen minutes of dialogue (with sound effects as needed), followed by the sign-off ("Tune in again for the next episode....") and a final throb from the Hammond.



Colgate-Palmolive-Peet (more specifically, its Super Suds dishwashing detergent) had become *Clara, Lu 'n' Em*'s sponsor on NBC, and, in 1931, engineered two firsts. The company moved the program from its original late-night timeslot to mid-morning: the first daytime serial. Colgate also became the first soap company to sponsor a daytime show, with targeted consumers—housewives—as the audience. And so *Clara, Lu 'n' Em* became the first soap opera.

Long before *Seinfeld*, *Clara, Lu 'n' Em* set a precedent for the "show about nothing" concept. The girls might comfortably discuss potatoes and politics in the same breath, or speculate for an entire show about whether women make decisions based on "ductive reason" or "tuition." Why did so many people want to listen to these three "zany housewives" talk about nothing, day after day? Were their audiences laughing with the characters or at them? Or both? And were Louise, Isobel, and Helen themselves laughing with or at Clara, Lu, and Em? Or both...

The folksiness of the show was indeed part of its charm. Perhaps there was an element of nostalgia, with the girls' naïve chatter representing an escape from the realities of the Depression. But another aspect of the program's appeal seems to have been the contrast between the characters and the women who portrayed them. Press releases

from the radio stations and sponsors, as well as newspaper interviews that appeared regularly, made no secret of the fact that the "three chatterbox gals, those neighborhood nitwits, queens of the washtub" from backward Peoria (famous for their down-home twang and unsteady grasp of current events) were played by college graduates who exuded intelligence and competence.

### [Sound: Dramatic Music]

By 1935, the three women behind the scenes had gotten married (becoming respectively Louise Mead, Isobel Berolzheimer, and Helen Mitchell) and given birth to their first children, while they continued to write and perform five shows per week. Their original weekly salary of \$150 from WGN had become \$1,500, which was supplemented by earnings from personal appearances at conventions and on stage. They—or rather their alter egos—had traveled to Washington, D.C. to comment on Roosevelt's inauguration, lunched at the Empire State Building with New York governor, Al Smith, and inspected International Harvester tractors at the Century of Progress World's Fair in Chicago.

Then, in December 1935, on the grounds that audiences wanted something different, Colgate dropped its sponsorship of *Clara, Lu 'n' Em*. The program was immediately picked up as a weekly show on Friday evenings (still on NBC) by Frigidaire. However, in January 1937, Isobel Berolzheimer (Lu) died unexpectedly of pneumonia, and *Clara, Lu 'n' Em* soon went off the air.

### Back On The Air

In the late 1930s, Louise Mead ("Clara") and Helen Mitchell ("Em") worked to revive the show. Their agent (with the colorful name of Biggie Levin) negotiated a contract with CBS sponsored by Pillsbury Flour. Harriet Allyn Crowley, another Northwestern University

School of Speech alumna, became the new "Lu." The show ran three days a week in a mid-morning timeslot starting in June 1942. Despite the patriotic content of their wartime scripts, the show was pulled in December. After one last try in 1945-1946, with a new cast—Harriet Crowley, Fran Allison (later of *Kukla, Fran & Ollie*), and Dorothy Day—and sponsored by Kitchen Klenzer (making the program a soap opera to the last), *Clara Lu 'n' Em* was finally cancelled.

### The Collection

The Records of *Clara Lu 'n' Em* consist of about ten feet of material, which date between 1925 and the 2000's. Eight scrapbooks of clippings document the women's lives and careers, but also are especially revealing about the ways in which the radio stations publicized the show and how sponsors pushed their products. The scrapbooks hold many examples of the press releases sent by NBC to newspapers across the country, and to current or potential affiliate radio stations and sponsors, as well as tearsheets from sponsors for newspaper or magazine ads (my personal favorites are the Super Suds ads, which recreate the feeling of a serial).

Contracts, correspondence, photographs, and promotional items (which include a souvenir spoon from the Century of Progress fair and a jigsaw puzzle of the girls eating lunch on the steps of the United States Capitol) add to the vivid picture of Clara, Lu

and Em's radio life. Fortunately, a few of the transcription disks also survived; these have been digitized, making the leisurely drawls of the gals and the archetypal "radio voice" of their announcer heard once again.

Scripts form the bulk of the collection. "Em" was careful to date and save her copies, which, over the course of nearly eight years (with the show airing as often as five days a week), filled a dozen card-file boxes. A highlight of the collection, the scripts are integral to understanding the charm (and the corniness) of the shows, as well as the creative energy of the three real-life women who wrote and performed them.

### Tune In Again

*Clara, Lu 'n' Em* was the first soap opera—the first daytime serial and the first daytime show to be sponsored by a soap company. It also stands as a unique example of an early radio show created, written, and performed by women. Still, despite these facts and despite its success, the program often has been neglected and remains forgotten today, even by old-time-radio aficionados and scholars. Perhaps with the availability of the Records of *Clara, Lu 'n' Em*, the radio team once known as "the female Will Rogers" will join the canon of radio classics—including *Vic and Sade*, *Lum and Abner*, and *Fibber McGee and Molly*—whose archives document popular entertainment in America before the era of television.



Louise, Isobel,  
and Helen,  
circa 1931  
(photograph  
by Balfour)

# News

## Theatre Magic: Technology, Innovation, and Effect

The Ohio State University Libraries presents *Theatre Magic: Technology, Innovation, and Effect* in the Thompson Gallery from January 21 through May 11, 2014. This exhibition explores the unsung heroes of theatre—the innovators, designers, and technicians—whose “magic” has wowed audiences since the beginnings of show business. Visitors will uncover the secrets behind special effects, explore the workings of a toy theatre and a 17th-century theatre through virtual reality, experience what a magic lantern “pose show” might have looked like, and have a chance to try their hand at theatrical lighting design. The exhibition will also feature numerous manuscripts, photographs, original designs, set models, props, and costumes from the special collections of the Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute.



Right: Pose plasticine glass magic lantern slide

Bottom:  
Costume designs  
for *The Beggar's  
Opera* by Daphne  
Dare

## Dance Heritage Coalition Explores “Living Archives”

The Dance Heritage Coalition, together with the Theatre Library Association (TLA), the International Guild of Musicians in Dance (IGMD), and Independent Media Arts Preservation (IMAP), has been awarded a National

Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to investigate the “Living Archives” of dance, theatre, and music organizations. This consortium planning grant will convene focus groups around the country to recommend best practices for performing arts archives.

Outcomes of the project will include: an online discussion tool, a model archiving program, and a demonstration plan proposing implementation of principles and best practices identified by the process. Information will be disseminated online via an interactive blog that will launch early in 2014 on the Dance Heritage Coalition’s [Web site](#).





## New Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum Exhibit

Established in 1959 by Rick Hall, Billy Sherrill and Tom Stafford, Florence Alabama Music Enterprises became the foundation for what has come to be known as the “Muscle Shoals Sound.” After assuming sole ownership, Rick Hall shortened the name to FAME Studios and moved the business to a repurposed candy and tobacco warehouse in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. There, Arthur Alexander recorded “You Better Move On,” FAME’s first hit record. The proceeds from the record allowed Rick and his house rhythm section to build the now iconic studio located at 603 East Avalon in Muscle Shoals, where some of the most influential sounds in American popular music were born.

With a presence as distinct as that of Motown or Sun Records, FAME Studios represented the confluence of country, gospel, and rhythm and blues music with a subtle emphasis on bass guitar and kick drum sounds. Early works by Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin, were recorded using a practice often referred to as a “head session.” In stark contrast to the charted arrangements heard in other popular recording studios of the time, the FAME studio sessions were characterized by the rhythm section’s improvisatory performances, responding to and supporting the melody or most prominent section of each song. The recording style encouraged true musical collaboration, which resulted in an undeniably unique sound that put Muscle Shoals on the musical map.

Under the ownership and guidance of Rick Hall, FAME Studios nurtured many of the most popular and beloved artists in the history of American music, including several Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees: Etta James, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Little Richard, Otis Redding, and Duane Allman, as well as Clarence Carter, Mac Davis, the Osmonds, Paul Anka, Jerry Reed, and many more.

In 2010, FAME Studios donated a portion of their archives to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, and that collection is now [available](#) for research at the Library and Archives. A related, free exhibit, *Sweet Soul Music: Fame Studios and the Muscle Shoals Sound*, will run through March 2014, and is on display in the Library Reading Room at the Library and Archives (2809 Woodland Avenue).

## Debut of Ransom Center Digital Site

In November 2013, the Harry Ransom Center, a humanities research library and museum at the University of Texas at Austin, launched a new [platform](#) of freely available digitized images of collection materials on its Web site. The new site contains 14,000 items and will continue to grow as newly digitized images are added on a regular basis.

Several theatre collections are featured: [Harry Houdini's scrapbooks](#); items from the Ransom Center's extensive [circus collection](#), including materials related to showmen such as P. T. Barnum, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey; and [dance photographs](#) by stage photographer Fred Fehl, showcasing works by Martha Graham and Alvin Ailey. Also included is a collection of [glass plate negatives](#) that documents theatre performances in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This fragile collection was previously inaccessible, but the negative plates were digitized and converted to positive images for the digital collection.

The digital collections platform provides access to the Ransom Center's collections for students, scholars, and members of the public who are unable to visit the Center. It also provides a way for visitors to access fragile materials or collections that can be a challenge to examine onsite, such as personal effects and costumes.

Collections are being added on an ongoing basis, and future digitization projects include: costumes designed by Léon Bakst for *Narcisse* (1911); tunics and hats designed by Nicholas Roerich for the premiere of *The Rite of Spring* (1913); and costumes made by Barbara Karinska for a 1937 production of *Le Coq d'Or*. The latter were designed by Natalia Goncharova for Sergei Diaghilev's 1914 production, and revisited by Goncharova for the 1937 staging. Additional selections from the Fred Fehl dance collection are planned.



Fred Fehl photograph of Martha Graham and other dancers in *Letter to the World* (1947)