



Performance!

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

SPRING 2019

NEWSLETTER OF THE SAA
PERFORMING ARTS SECTION

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Message From the Co-Chairs

Greetings PAR members,

In this issue

We are pleased to share this new issue of *Performance!*, which features articles about archival activities at the Bob Baker Marionette Theater and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Special thanks to the editorial team who put this issue together, which includes new co-editor Kelly Kress, with Alonso Avila (who continues for another term), as well as John Davis and Carolina Meneses, who have stepped up to volunteer. In addition to the newsletter, the Performing Arts Steering Committee has been working on a number of initiatives since the 2018 annual meeting and the last issue of *Performance!* came out. The Steering Committee welcomes feedback from Section members about these initiatives, briefly outlined below.

One of the ideas we are pursuing is to encourage Section members to organize some kind of program about performing arts repositories or related topics of interest in their local area. Since the SAA conference occurs only once per year and many Section members are unable to attend, we would like to create more opportunities for more Section members to get involved, network, learn from their peers, and advocate for performing arts archives. We were excited to learn that plans are underway for a meetup group of performing arts archivists in the New York City metropolitan area that is being organized by Bonnie Marie Sauer, Director of Archives and Records Management for Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. The group's first meeting is scheduled to take place on April 4th and we hope to report back on that event and the group's plans in the next issue.

Given that many Section members also participate in other professional organizations at the state, multi-state, and/or local level, the Steering Committee is also asking Section members to consider the possibility of putting together programs in conjunction with their attendance at one of these group's upcoming conferences or meetings. Some ideas might include: hosting a tour of your repository, organizing a group trip to a local event, or collaborating on bringing a workshop to your area.

If you're looking for advice on pulling together some type of program, the Steering Committee wants to hear from you!

Another way the Steering Committee would like to make the PAR Section more accessible to all its membership is to present webinars on issues in performing arts archives. Thanks to those of you who participated in the survey about possible webinar offerings, which demonstrated widespread member interest in both copyright and digital preservation. We welcome suggestions for additional areas that would be useful to members, but our first webinar, currently in the works, will be about the Music Modernization Act and how it impacts copyright of music sound recordings. The date has not yet been scheduled, so stay tuned to the Section email list and online forum for details.

Taking advantage of the Section website is another way the Steering Committee would like to keep the Section relevant for members and non-members alike. Fortunately, Supriya Wronkiewicz volunteered to help with updating and maintaining the site and is our new Section Web Liaison. She has been busy developing a page with links to online resources designed to support performing arts repositories, such as the Dance/USA Artist's Legacy Toolkit. Thanks to Supriya for volunteering to serve in this capacity!

Finally, we are pleased to announce that the PAR Section has arranged a special tour of the Harry Ransom Center at the 2019 SAA Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas. Details will be forthcoming, but we hope to see you there.

Elizabeth Surlles and Helice Koffler
Co-Chairs of the Performing Arts Roundtable

Preserving Place: Moving the Bob Baker Marionette Theater

by Brianna Toth and Adam Foster

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 : Brianna Toth is the Assistant Archivist for the Bob Baker Marionette Theater. Adam Foster is
 : the Head Archivist for the Bob Baker Marionette Theater. They are both graduate students in
 : UCLA's MLIS program on the Media Archival Studies track.
 :

Right: Front courtyard of the Bob Baker Marionette Theater, Photo: Adam Foster.



“At the Bob Baker Marionette Theater, we see the world as a birthday cake: baked in imagination, frosted in culture and tradition, served on a silver platter of history, sprinkled with stardust, and topped with whipped cream of delight.”

– Alex Evans, Executive Director

WELCOME TO THE BOB BAKER MARIONETTE THEATER

Nestled below a freeway overpass at a precarious intersection in Los Angeles, the [Bob Baker Marionette Theater](#) (BBMT) has

hosted performances for the young and old since 1963. The space itself is not only a theater, but also a warehouse (where 3,000 puppets are stored), a party room (used for children’s birthdays, events and workshops), an office (for the part-time directors and staff), in addition to an archives (previously used as a creative studio and library by Bob Baker during his lifetime). Intentionally built to function like one of the old Hollywood studios that Bob often worked for, the archives includes a wealth of paratextual material he used to create his characters and design the



Left: Bob and his business partner Alton Wood pose in front of a selection of their marionettes. This selection will grow to almost 3,000 puppets in their lifetime.

Middle: Inside view of the Bob Baker Marionette Theater Archives and Library, Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber.

Bottom: Theater stage, Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber.

Theater’s productions. Today, these materials are used to understand how to execute existing productions, as well as perform and create new ones. For this reason, the reference materials within the archives are constantly moving in and out of the space, sometimes even being transformed into completely new work.

Walking into the Bob Baker Marionette Theater one realizes that nothing is static within this whimsical space. Envisioned, built and maintained with the imagination, dedication and self-determination of a small revolving group of puppeteers, people often comment that they feel transported out of time or everyday life when they are at the theater. Before a show, puppeteers rush around vacuuming the carpet, meticulously decorating tables with streamers, brewing fresh coffee in the kitchen, and rehearsing their routines backstage. Upon closer examination of the space, the ceiling lights are made from coffee cans, disco

balls hang next to gaudy chandeliers, walls are painted to look like stage curtains and the floor of the courtyard is painted green with daisies. Everywhere you look there is a creative solution or inventive construction that personifies the can-do attitude that has carried the theater along for over 55 years. For a theater that exists in continual motion, and is now officially moving its entire holdings and operation to a new physical location, how do archivists preserve the original order of this theater’s history?



FIRST ARCHIVISTS ON THE SCENE

For the past two years, we have worked as the Theater’s first archivists while attending UCLA’s MLIS program. Adam was initially drawn to the Theater through previous work in entertainment and puppetry arts, while Brianna became involved due to interest in working with the Theater’s 1/4” open reel audio collection, and background working with artist spaces. Although we both originally started as volunteers, we were eventually awarded funding in the summer of 2018 through the UCLA Community Archives Lab—a project funded by the Mellon Foundation which awards stipends to MLIS students working with community spaces in Southern California. This funding has allowed us the time and resources to manage the Theater’s collections more thoroughly over the past year by documenting the sentimental nature of the space and its collections, as well as creating workflows and systems to maintain physical control of the Theater’s archives during the move.

Originally, the Theater’s archives functioned as Bob Baker’s creative studio, which was physically separated from the rest of the theater on a lofted mezzanine level behind a locked door. Since Bob’s death the archives has slowly become accessible to



Right: Inside view of the Bob Baker Marionette Theater Archives and Library, Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber.

Middle: Handmade banner over the doorway to the Theater's shop. Photo: Ryan Savoy.

Bottom: Image files for visual reference used prior to the advent of the Internet, Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber.



the internal staff, puppeteers, and community members whose personal connection with the space has deepened as a result. With this access, the paratextual materials that make up the vast majority of this collection now serve to instruct the Theater community about the various facets that went into producing Bob's shows. Within this collection are puppets, oral histories, concept art, picture files, books, magazines, records, cassette tapes, 1/4" open reel audio tapes, analog videotapes, films, digitally-born videos, as well as business records and personal documentation on paper.



In the beginning, we grappled with trying to understand if there was an order to the space and what sort of order might need to be preserved. With a lack of documentation, and those who worked with Bob to build the theater being elderly or deceased, we were left with many questions as to his intent and creative vision. This issue is compounded by the theater's imminent move to a new space, since knowing the

order (and what should or should not be recreated in a new location) is imperative under these circumstances. To compensate for this, we interviewed over 20 community members from various generations over the past couple of years, in an attempt to document what can be remembered about the space, and any original order which may still exist. With what we've learned, we will describe the complex identity of this community archives and the challenges a kinetic space such as this brings with it, in relation to maintaining original order while moving an entire archives.



"IF THEY CAN DO IT... WHY CAN'T WE?"

So how does one preserve the idea of place when you must physically relocate it? Even with a signed lease for a new space, it is unclear what the reimagining of the theater will look like with so much that remains to be seen. Although it will continue to be a successful space for gathering, educating, and performing, the Theater must also retain ownership of the records and materials that symbolically describe and identify its history and community. As stewards of this archives, we recognize that just having a space with objects in it is not enough—it is the context and history of this space that imbues them with their worth. In an attempt to grapple with the daunting task of moving an entire community archives, while maintaining the integrity of its identity, we decided to document the physical arrangement of the archives before anything was moved. Records of this arrangement were then incorporated into

the inventory templates and unique identifiers given to the theater’s holdings at the collection and item levels. Below is a list of the projects we designed to incrementally apply this workflow in loose chronological order:

Establishing physical control

- The space was documented photographically, with 2D and 3D maps, as well as with a VR rendering.
- Inventory templates were created on Google Sheets with examples of proper data entry, so volunteers could assist with inventory creation where needed. Depending on the collection’s preservation priorities these inventories varied in detail.
- The collection was mapped and shelves were labeled with unique identifiers that corresponded to the format, collection, and location from which it was being moved. To do this with volunteers, we also created rubrics for boxing procedures.



Consulting with other archival professionals at the Getty Research Institute, 20th Century Fox Archives, The Walt Disney Company, and Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences about best practices and to get feedback on procedures and workflows we wanted to implement.



Left: Adam and one of our volunteers Jen Arcand after fully packing four entire shelves of reference books.

Middle: View of 3D SketchUp Model of space with collections color coded by format by Brianna Toth and one of our volunteers Alicia Houtrouw helping us identify concept art with water damage and mold.

Bottom: All of the boxed material was given a unique identifier that related to its original location and the format of the material in the box.





IN CLOSING

Although moving poses numerous challenges, it has also provided many benefits due to the positive change it introduced. As a result of having to pack the theater’s archives, the staff has been compelled to assess the collection’s value with us. During this process, conversations have begun about how to define the scope of the collection, as well as implement accession and deaccession policies. To manage these issues, we are in the process of forming a Collection Committee, who will determine these policies as a group consisting of members of the theater’s staff and community.

Taking on the new roles of archivists within an organization that has never had one before, we’ve learned many lessons through trial and error. Although we have both managed components of collections within an archives previously, neither of us have been solely in charge of an entire archives. For this reason, we both feel extremely fortunate to have each other as sounding boards, and also to share the workload. We believe that having each other for professional and emotional support while managing such a personal collection, has been paramount to our success in laying a sustainable foundation for the theater’s library and archives.

Left: Adam helping box on a volunteer inventory day.

Bottom: Artist rendering by Carson Brown of the Theater’s new location on 4949 York Boulevard in the Highland Park neighborhood of Los Angeles California.

Conducting an audit of the Theater’s archives that established collections by format, calculated linear and cubic feet, approximated totals for each of the collections’ holdings, and provided recommendations for archival storage and housing.

- These metrics enabled us to calculate how many boxes we needed for packing and to budget for these expenses.
- We also believe this material could be used in the future to create a finding aid.

Creating project lead positions (a.k.a other dedicated volunteers who could serve as point people if we were not there) with designated duties and a loose hierarchy of responsibility.

Setting a timeline for packing that adhered to the tight move schedule that was slated for early April. This timeline broke up the archives by format-specific collections, starting with smaller less fragile ones, and ending with larger collections that required volunteers with art handling or archival experience to pack.



Rendering by Carson Brown.

WDCH Dreams: *Modernizing the LA Phil Archives for a Data-Driven Centennial Exhibit*

By Selena Chau

Selena Chau is the Digital Archives Manager at the Los Angeles Philharmonic. After a career in dance, performing in operas, musicals, and concert dance works, Selena received her Master of Library and Information Sciences degree and has applied her project management and technical skills in museum, research library, and broadcast environments. She crafted an audio preservation and access plan for KBOO 90.7 in Portland, Oregon as part of the AAPB National Digital Stewardship Residency and performed rights clearance of archival videos at the NYPL Performing Arts research library. Selena has published and presented her work through archives organizations, led workshops on open-source digital archiving tools, and is on the board of the Theatre Library Association.

Right: *WDCH Dreams*. Credit: Dustin Downing.



If a building had dreams, what might they look like? To celebrate its hundred-year musical legacy, the Los Angeles Philharmonic commissioned media artist Refik Anadol to find a way to enable its home, Walt Disney Concert Hall (WDCH), to “dream.” Institutional memory allows our history to endure and dreaming has the power to transform our memories into a provocative vision of the future. The LA Phil’s institutional memory is held in archival records as well as in its concert hall’s signature archi-

tecture. Anadol explored this synergy between architecture and memory and, in close collaboration with the LA Phil’s archival team, succeeded in creating a digital dreaming process for Walt Disney Concert Hall. The poetic result was *WDCH Dreams* which was fueled by 100 years worth of digital memories, then transformed by machine intelligence. Angelenos standing in front of Walt Disney Concert Hall enjoyed the public art project for a week last October, as 12-minute performances of data



Left: TEAC 7030SL Open Reel Audio Player. Captured by photographer Elif Karakoc for the *WDCH Dreams* project .

Bottom: Repertoire Cards photographed by Refik Anadol Studio.

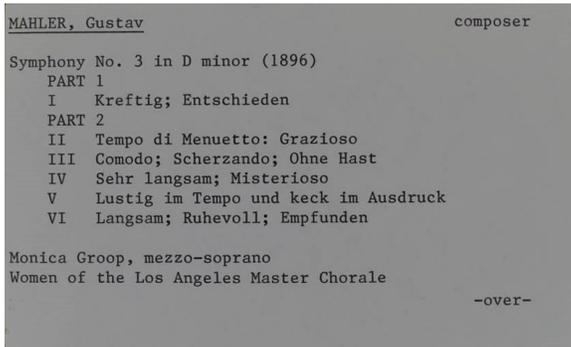
visualization danced across the four-story stainless-steel exterior of the Frank Gehry-designed iconic building.

In total, the LA Phil archivists provided Anadol with 45 terabytes of data including documents, images, audio, video, and performance history data. However, when Anadol first visited the Archives in October 2017 to learn how much of the orchestra’s history could be delivered as data, only a tiny fraction of the 2,400 linear feet of Archives collections had been digitized. The institution’s archival records were tucked away in a windowless, 2,500-square-foot space in the Los Angeles County Hall of Records, where the Archives began its operations in 1993. With a centennial milestone looming, the LA Phil looked to the Archives for historic knowledge and assets. The Archives became the backbone of Anadol’s high-tech, media-rich project, as the artist tasked the archivists with collecting all the raw data he needed. The Archives staff had just one short year to modernize its operations, become experts in institutional history, and gather the digital assets to meet *WDCH Dreams*’ massive data requirements. In the process, the Archives accelerated digitization projects with vendors, defined digital preservation workflows to manage digital files, and overhauled its entire technology toolset. Inspired by one artist’s vision and a fast approaching deadline, the Archives staff was motivated to make improvements that might ordinarily have taken several years in mere months.

Before the inception of *WDCH Dreams*, the Ar-

chives department had already implemented transformative changes in order to be competitive with our orchestra peers. Over the course of one year, seven new staff members joined the department. I started working as Digital Archives Manager in May 2017 and faced many challenges right away, with the most shocking being highly inadequate network speed. Upload speeds at the Archives were 1/600th the speed of those at WDCH. To save a single TIFF at 600 ppi prevented other staff from using the network connection for 15 minutes to complete even such routine tasks as Web research or editing and saving documents. Under these conditions, implementing digital preservation standards was out of the question. We could sacrifice neither digitization quality nor our team’s daily productivity. Archives and IT staff immediately and persistently communicated this issue to the County’s IT staff until the Archives network speed had increased 44-fold. We were on our way.

Prior to the start of the *WDCH Dreams* project, the Archives had seldom considered a comprehensive data preservation solution for its digital records. For the first time, we had to develop digital preservation practices to ensure that the institution’s historic records were accurate and accessible. Archives staff were well versed in digital preservation but needed appropriate tools and equipment to perform the work. No other department at the LA Phil had previously requested open-source software, so IT staff had to review our request for the new tools before approving them. Once installed, software such as Audacity, FFmpeg, BWF MetaEdit, VLC, and Exact Audio Copy comprised a standard suite of tools that are now used to build efficient digital archiving workflows, enabling us, for example, to convert archival audio data into sustainable file formats in bulk, identify and document digital audio artifacts, and add timecode cataloging details to determine if digital recordings contain complete



Right: Don Giovanni set design, 2012. Captured by photographer Elif Karakoc for the *WDCH Dreams* project.

Bottom: 1935 LA Phil Scrapbook. Captured by photographer Elif Karakoc for the *WDCH Dreams* project.

performances.

The Archives purchased a new collections management database which was sorely needed both to manage our collections and to streamline work for the *WDCH Dreams* project. The new database would have to organize disparate physical and digital collection details in a shared hierarchical arrangement, provide custom search and report capabilities, allow batch metadata editing, and offer responsive client support. We considered software options recommended by colleagues in the archival community and made a shortlist of three vendors. We then calculated a weighted score for each software option based on how many of its features met the LA Phil Archives' functional requirements and combined this quantitative assessment with qualitative feedback from vendors' existing clients and LA Phil Archives staff. The commercial Web-hosted Lucidea CuadraSTAR package emerged as our best choice, meeting our needs most effectively and providing regular West Coast client support hours. With this powerful new tool, Archives staff embarked on a massive metadata cleaning process to reduce the digital clutter that had accumulated over the years. The new technology tools and additional staff truly constituted an Archives makeover.



Yet modernizing the Archives was just one aspect of delivering data for *WDCH Dreams*. We knew that each department managed their own silo of assets, which amounted to terabytes of useable intellectual property. In the absence of digital archiving mandates, these assets were not consistently managed

or accessible. Our new digital asset manager met with staff in each department to determine which assets could be used for *WDCH Dreams*. Once identified, these assets were added to a newly launched institution-wide digital asset management system which became a central digital repository for discovering institutional



assets. In addition to data that came from departments across the LA Phil, the Anadol Studio collected text, audio, video, and image data by Web-scraping the LA Phil's web and social media sites. Anadol's colleague Elif Karakoc supplemented our collection of digitized records with beautiful photography of oversize and three-dimensional production models, memorabilia, and awards—historically resonant items in our collections that could not be digitized in any other way.

Just as performing arts evolve over time, the practices of documenting the history of a musical organization must change dynamically to keep pace. LA Phil Archives reflects the shift from analog to digital record-keeping methods over the past hundred years. In the 1920s, the LA Phil's volunteer groups assembled scrapbooks of newspaper articles and photographs, while digital press kits are created today. Performance audio recorded on both analog and legacy digital formats, from one-quarter-inch reels to DATs and CDs, are now captured directly as digital files. Typewritten and hand-marked repertoire cards kept by the music library were replaced by a robust performance history database in the 1990s. To-

day's stories of musicians on tour posted on Instagram are the modern equivalent of the home movies from the 1960s done using Super 8 film. The significance of the rich institutional memories held in Archives collections cannot be measured, but the total digitized records provide a quantitative description of the LA Phil digital archives.

WDCH Dreams drew upon 587,763 image files, 1,880 video files, 1,483 metadata files, and 17,773 audio files—the equivalent of 40,000 hours of audio from 16,471 performances. Anadol's team, including AI experts at Google's Artists + Machine Intelligence program, applied generative machine learning techniques, such as deep neural networks, to these 45 terabytes of data. The deep neural network could recall the totality of LA Phil's "memories" and form new connections among them. This resulted in a new machine-generated sound-and-image hybrid: the "dreams" of LA Phil's future projected onto Walt Disney Concert Hall.

WDCH Dreams had a lasting impact on the Archives. We revamped an underutilized collection, updated our practices, centralized LA Phil's digital assets,

and delivered an astounding amount of data to support the project. With the digital improvements made to the Archives workspace and workflows, our staff has become a collaborative partner with LA Phil's Marketing, Development, Artistic, and IT departments. The LA Phil Archives today are poised to remain at the forefront of institutional knowledge management and make recommendations for ongoing intellectual property management. *WDCH Dreams* showcases the immense value of an integrated and well-resourced archive for day-to-day operations and landmark celebrations alike.

For more information about *WDCH Dreams* and to learn more about the LA Phil's 100-year history please visit: www.laphil.com/wdchdreams.



Left: Elif Karakoc sets up photography equipment at the LA Phil Archives.

News

The Legacy of Chicago Dance
Saturday, April 27, 2019 – Saturday,
July 6, 2019

Roger J. Trienens Galleries
Free and open to the public

What defines and distinguishes Chicago dance and the city's dance community? Many dance styles converge and coexist in Chicago, from ballet and flamenco to jazz, tap, contemporary/modern, house, and dances from around the world. Influenced not only by early European dance styles and trends, but also by Indigenous communities and their dances, Chicago continues to serve as a uniquely wide-ranging hub for dance.

In order to understand the brilliance of the Chicago dance community today, it is necessary to uncover its history. *The Legacy of Chicago Dance* explores this vast and rich history through the Newberry Library's extensive dance collection—much of which is derived from the archives

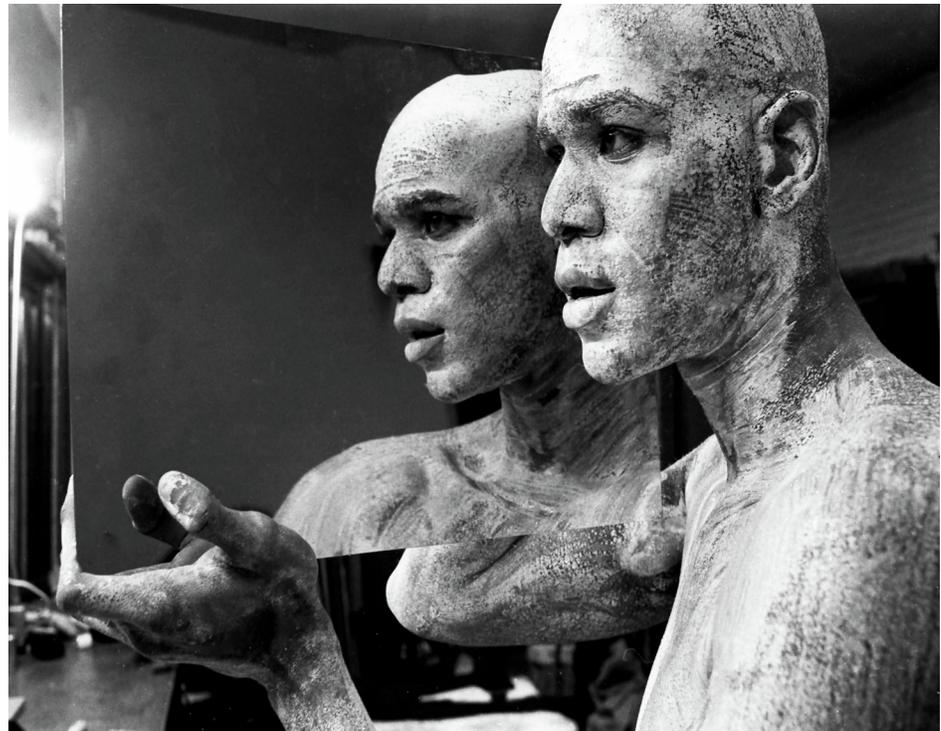
of Chicago's powerhouse dancers, choreographers, teachers, and companies.

Many leaders in the world of dance got their start in Chicago and its surrounding regions. Choreographers, dancers, and founders of dance companies not only performed in Chicago, but some stayed and continued their work in the Windy City. Many were born and raised in the area and developed their artistic forms in Chicago throughout their lives. Others left Chicago and returned later on, bringing back new stylistic influences that would be absorbed into the Chicago dance culture.

This exhibition is curated by Alison Hinderliter and Samantha Smith, of the Newberry's Modern Manuscripts Section.

Exhibition galleries are open 8:15 am to 5 pm Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays, and 8:15 am to 7:30 pm Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays; closed Sundays.

Right: Chicago dancer/
 choreographer
 Poonie Dodson.



Section Leadership 2018-2019

Co-Chairs

Elizabeth Surles
Rutgers University
Newark, NJ
elizabeth.surles@rutgers.edu

Helice Koffler
The Shubert Archive
New York, NY
helicek@shubertarchive.org

Web Liaison

Supira Wronkiewicz
Museum of Performance and Design
San Francisco, CA
swronkiewicz@gmail.com

Steering Committee

Brenna Edwards
Emory University
Atlanta, GA
brenna.edwards@emory.edu

Vincent Novara
University of Maryland
College Park, MD
vnovara@umd.edu

Newsletter Assistants

John R. Davis
University of Maryland
College Park, MD
jrdavis@umd.edu

Carolina Meneses
UCLA
Los Angeles, CA
camesenes@ucla.edu

Newsletter Editors

Kelly Kress
Los Angeles Philharmonic Association
Los Angeles, CA
kelly.kress@gmail.com

Alonso Avila
Oberlin College
Oberlin, OH
aavila@oberlin.edu

Image Credits

Cover: Artist rendering by Carson Brown of the Bob Baker Marionette Theater's new interior

Pages 3-7: Photos courtesy of Brianna Toth, Adam Foster, Ian Byers-Gamber, and the Bob Baker Marionette Theater.

Pages 8-11: Photos courtesy of Selena Chau, Dustin Downing, WDCH Dreams project, Refik Anadol Studio, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Archives.

Page 12: Photo courtesy of Newberry Library.

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