



# PERFORMANCE!

Newsletter of the SAA  
Performing Arts Section

SUMMER/FALL 2022

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**COVER PHOTO:** “The Old Drop Scene.” Rhode Island Historical Society.

## **Publish on the Performing Arts Section Blog!**

Starting in January 2023, the Performing Arts Section will transition from a biannual newsletter to a blog. This will allow us to gather, edit, and publish your announcements and articles within one month of submission!

If you are using performing arts archival materials in any capacity, including as a researcher or performer, we want to hear about it. We are interested in stories from those in all stages of their careers. Both shorter and longer articles and news items are welcome, but submissions should be kept under 900 words and may include up to three accompanying images.

Please send your ideas to [saaperformingartssection@gmail.com](mailto:saaperformingartssection@gmail.com).

# Message from the Co-Chairs



Dear Performing Arts Section Members,

It is our pleasure to greet you on the pages of this new issue of *Performance!* As this year began, the steering committee welcomed four new members: Elizabeth Batiuk (2022–24), Curator of Performing Arts Collections at Vanderbilt University; Juliette Appold (2022–23), Head of the Music Section at the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled of the Library of Congress; Arianne Quinn (2022–24), Music Special Collections Librarian at Florida State University; and Ashley Minnich (2022–24), Educational Technologist for Colorado State University Pueblo and longtime community theatre participant who has joined the committee as co-chair. The new members bring diverse and unique expertise to our section and strengthen its musical profile.

We are happy to announce that this issue of *Performance!* will inaugurate a transition from biannual newsletters to a blog which will allow our editors to solicit, edit, and publish your submissions with more flexibility than before. We look forward to seeing an engaging discussion develop on our future blog. Please see the message about this transition on the table of contents page!

As we look to the year ahead of us, we hope to organize a round table talk similar to what we had last year on dance, however focusing on a different performing arts genre. We would also like to include more events in our annual program, and will soon be sending out a survey for our section members to learn more about your interests for future events. Please let us know what you would like the section to offer in terms of professional development, network opportunities, and other programming, such as round tables, webinars, coffee chats, etc., that meet your intellectual and professional interests and inspire you. We will hold our annual section meeting next summer. Though it seems far away now, it will be here before we know it. Please let us know if you are interested in any specific type of programming for that event.

At the same time, we are considering revising our bylaws. We would like to ensure that the section's operational guidelines will allow greater flexibility in attracting new members to the committee and galvanize professional exchange across the section.

We will be posting our meeting minutes on the PAS website to keep you informed about our work. As always, we invite your input there as well.

Wishing you a successful and healthy 2022–23,

Katalin Rac & Ashley Minnich

SAA PAS Co-Chairs

## Section Leadership 2022–2023

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# The Voces del Teatro Oral History Archive: Let our “Voces” Be Heard

by Liane Schirmer & Minerva Garcia



*Alejandra Flores - Actor, Artistic Director. Photo credit José Carrillo*

The Voces del Teatro Oral History Archive is the first attempt to chronicle the history of Latinx theatre in modern Los Angeles. This oral history collection begins in the 1960s with the rise of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and continues into the present. Currently, there are 40 hour-long interviews with the key theatre-makers, including actors, playwrights, directors, designers, choreographers and artistic directors, who pioneered this genre. Given that there are now over 20 Latinx theatre companies, numerous individual artists, and independent productions, it is surprising that this genre has thus far been largely ignored by “mainstream” theatre historians. We feel that it is unconscionable that our theatre lacks the proper scholarship merited by such a long and varied trajectory.

Los Angeles is home to the largest number of Latinx theatre companies in the United States. Perhaps this is a result of our artists remaining invisible in terms of television and film opportunities. Theatre has always been a labor of love, but for the Latinx community it is a cultural response to erasure from the stage and screen. As a community of artists, we had long felt the need to document our performing arts history, not as a series of isolated reviews, but as a significant theatre movement.

The pandemic, and the resulting economic downturn caused many of our smaller companies to close their doors. Also, the loss of several of our respected elder theatre artists brought home the fact that the Latinx theatre story was in danger of disappearing. In response, we produced a series of first-hand video and audio interviews as a testament to the passion, dedication and creativity of our Latinx artists. Vital for future generations of Latinx theatre makers and the community at large, the Voces del Teatro Oral History Archive will hopefully inspire a continued interest in and support of Latinx theatre.

Selecting our first two groups of interviewees proved a challenge. The pandemic made us prioritize the elder theatre makers (mostly actors and artistic directors) in Phase One, who were at risk not only from COVID-19 but from their age. We also wanted to include the artistic directors of the more established theatre companies, as well those whose companies had closed. In Phase Two, we expanded our selection to include directors, designers, playwrights and choreographers. We began with the companies and artists who established themselves in the late 1960s, and continued chronologically up to the early 2000s. Our goal is 100 interviews covering Latinx theatre up to the present day. Since 2020, we have completed Phase One and Phase Two, each consisting of 20 interviews.

Throughout the last 50 years, over 20 Latinx theatre companies have produced a variety of plays in Spanish and English, comprising several genres: Spanish Golden Age classics, Chicano theatre classics, contemporary drama, comedies, children's theatre, street theatre and political theatre. Our elder theatre practitioners established companies that exist to this day.

Although produced in Los Angeles, Latinx theatre reflects the range of Latin American cultures in the city, including Central and South American, Caribbean, Chicano and Indigenous. These theatres have served as an artistic home and a community space where we can express, share and learn about our culture. It is also a public square where we make our voices heard and activate for change.

Theatre is a dynamic, real-time exchange between artist and audience. By using the oral history format, we're able to recreate that intimate connection. These interviews allow us an unprecedented opportunity to witness the artist's journey in their own words. Each of the interviewees gives us a personal account of what it was like to be a Latinx artist in their time, overcoming prejudice in the entertainment industry in order to realize their artistic dream. The interviews also reflect the tenacity and ingenuity of our people who created theatre in spite of economic and social disadvantage.



*Top: Carla Valentine - Actor, Producer. Photo Credit - José Carrillo*

*Bottom: Luis Alfaro - Playwright. Photo Credit - José Carrillo*



*José Cruz González - Playwright. Photo Credit - José Carrillo*

We're fortunate to be sponsored by the Latinx Theatre Alliance / Los Angeles (LTA/LA), whose mission is "...to share the rich and varied American Latino experience on the national stage..." Currently, the interviews are available, free of charge, on the LTA/LA website.

In 2021 and 2022, we produced public virtual events to celebrate the completion of Phase One and Two. We invited a distinguished panel of scholars, journalists, theatre historians and elder theatre artists to provide a context for the content of the interviews. At both events, we showed highlight reels from phases of the project. These events were very well attended and received by the Latinx theatre community.

We joined L.A. as Subject in 2022 and were selected to participate in their pilot advisory program for At-Risk Archives. Their advice was invaluable in helping us to chart our course forward. In the fall of 2022, Voces del Teatro was invited to host a booth at the L.A. as Subject Archives Bazaar, where a great deal of interest was generated amidst L.A. historians, educational institutions, and museums. Our immediate goal is to partner with a larger institution that has the resources to safely store and widely share this archive. We also hope that the interviews will become part of college and university curricula in both the theatre and history departments.

While this is presently an oral history archive, we hope to expand into collecting Los Angeles Latinx theatre ephemera to ensure that the physical evidence of these theatre productions is preserved.

We invite everyone to explore the archive and experience theatre through a different cultural lens. We hope that you will be as excited as we are about these unique and trail-blazing theatre makers. Please visit the Voces del Teatro Oral History Archive at <https://www.lta-la.org/oral-history-archive>.

*Liane Schirmer is a theatre artist as well as an L.A. historian. For the last 30 years, she has worked as an actor and director in many of these Latinx theatres. A member of L.A. as Subject as well as several historical societies, she is also an archivist and researcher specializing in the history of Los Angeles.*

*Minerva Garcia is a professional actor/theater director with a 30 year career. She is also one of the founding members and a Co-Facilitator of the Latinx Theatre Alliance/Los Angeles (LTA/LA).*

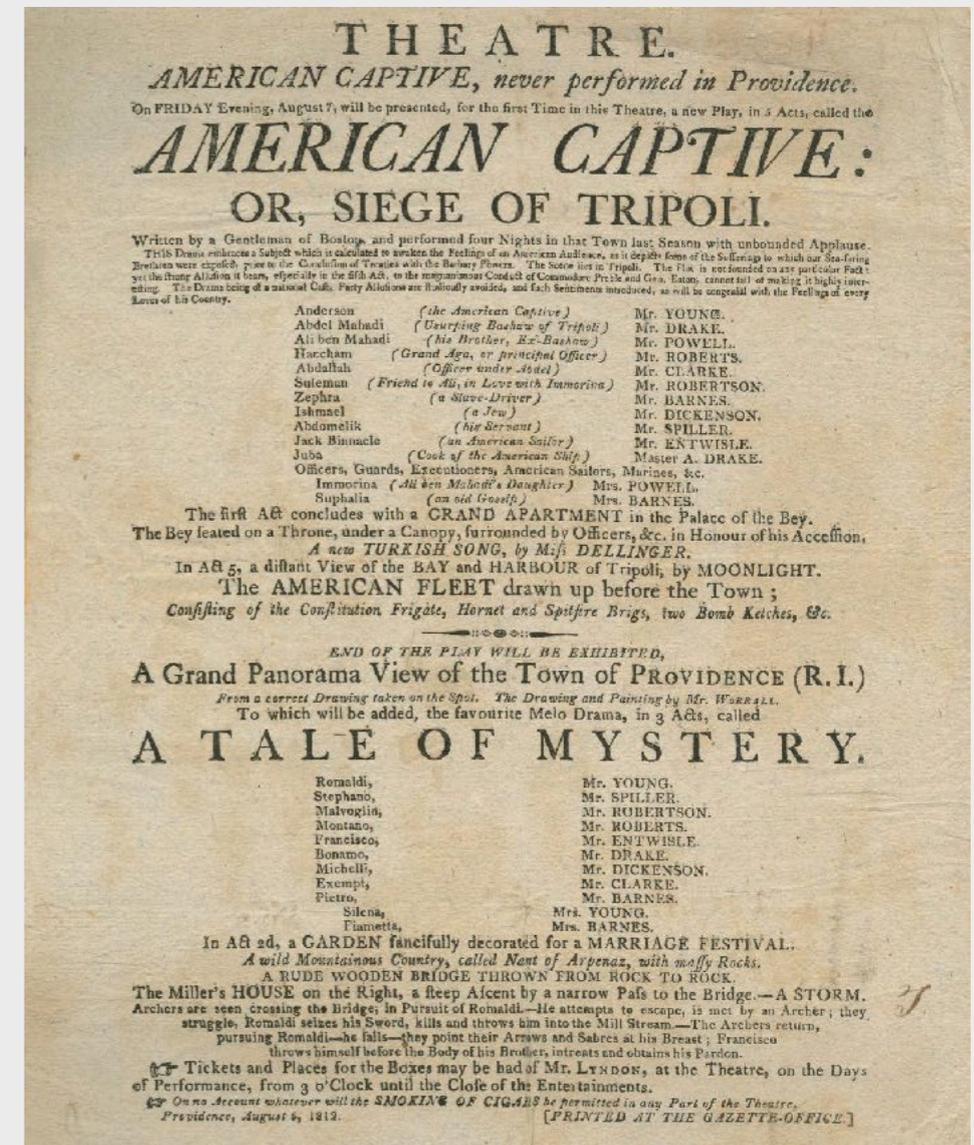
# “The Old Drop Scene” Conservation Project at the Rhode Island Historical Society

## Francis Frost

The Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) has recently completed a unique hybrid restoration of a large painted theater curtain; a prized work in its collections since 1833. “The Old Drop Scene”, the earliest known surviving drop scene, or act drop, in the United States, is a 15 x 24 ft. panoramic view of Providence, Rhode Island, painted in 1812 by the Boston scene painter John Worrall (ca. 1783 - 1825). The drop scene was first shown at the Providence Theatre on 8 July 1812, as a special attraction between plays, and was a great success with the local audience. It was promoted in playbills and exhibited once or twice a season for a few years, and then used as a traditional drop scene. The theater closed in 1832, and RIHS acquired the drop scene RIHS the following year.

Boston's Federal Street Theatre took over the management of the Providence Theatre in 1811, and they brought their actors and actresses, as well as their scene painter, John Worrall. He had painted a panorama of Boston in 1810, and another some years later in 1818, but this is the only one to survive. The scene, which shows almost 200 homes, businesses and churches in the flourishing city, was exhibited occasionally over the next 140 years but for most of the time it was rolled and stored away. In 1974 it was installed in its present home at the Aldrich House, Providence.

The condition of the drop scene had been deteriorating for many years (the first mention of this is in 1830), and some traditional restoration took place in the early 1980s, and to a lesser extent in 2018. However, the damaged and fragile state of the scene, as well as its very large size, meant that more physical restoration beyond just this minimal work would have been too invasive and costly. The RIHS realized that a new approach had to be found to restore this work, using non-traditional methods.



1812 broadside playbill mentioning the drop scene



*"The Old Drop-scene," present day*



*"The Old Drop-scene",  
completed digital image*

Working with a photographer who specializes in the digital restoration of art, and a painter trained in theater scene painting, the RIHS developed a plan to digitally recreate how this work looked in the early nineteenth century. The curtain was photographed in 78 overlapping sections, and the individual digital files merged together into one large master file. Photo-editing software was then used to retouch damaged areas as much as possible, using multiple digital layers to preserve the texture of the canvas on one layer, while working on others to replace missing color and areas of detail.

However, there were certain areas that were too damaged or indistinct to be restored digitally, and in those cases large-scale archival reproduction prints were made of the particular sections and the painter began to retouch these prints. By looking at certain enlarged details, for example the base of the columns and comparing them to similar elements in other parts of the scene, the painter was able to use brushwork and shading to match the style of the original as closely as possible.

Finally, these over-painted prints were photographed and the digital files joined together, creating one large image of the drop scene as it would have appeared originally. This digital image is only an interpretation—the original work remains untouched—so if new information or research shows that changes should be made to color choices or certain details for example, then this can easily be done at any time on the digital file.

The RIHS plans to create an interactive website for the study of this renovated work, allowing scholars and the public to investigate Providence of the Early National Period; its architecture, residents, businesses, theater and more. Large prints of sections of the image, or the entire scene, will be created and used for promotional and marketing purposes. Also, the RIHS is eager for other institutions, as well as private collectors, to learn about the possibilities of this hybrid restoration approach for the conservation of large or fragile works, tapestries, theater curtains and more, allowing for a thoughtful balance between restoration and the integrity of the original object.

This project was possible through generous funding from the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, the Herman H. Rose Civic, Cultural and Media Access Fund (RI Foundation), and by Sylvia Brown through the Hope Foundation (Providence, RI).

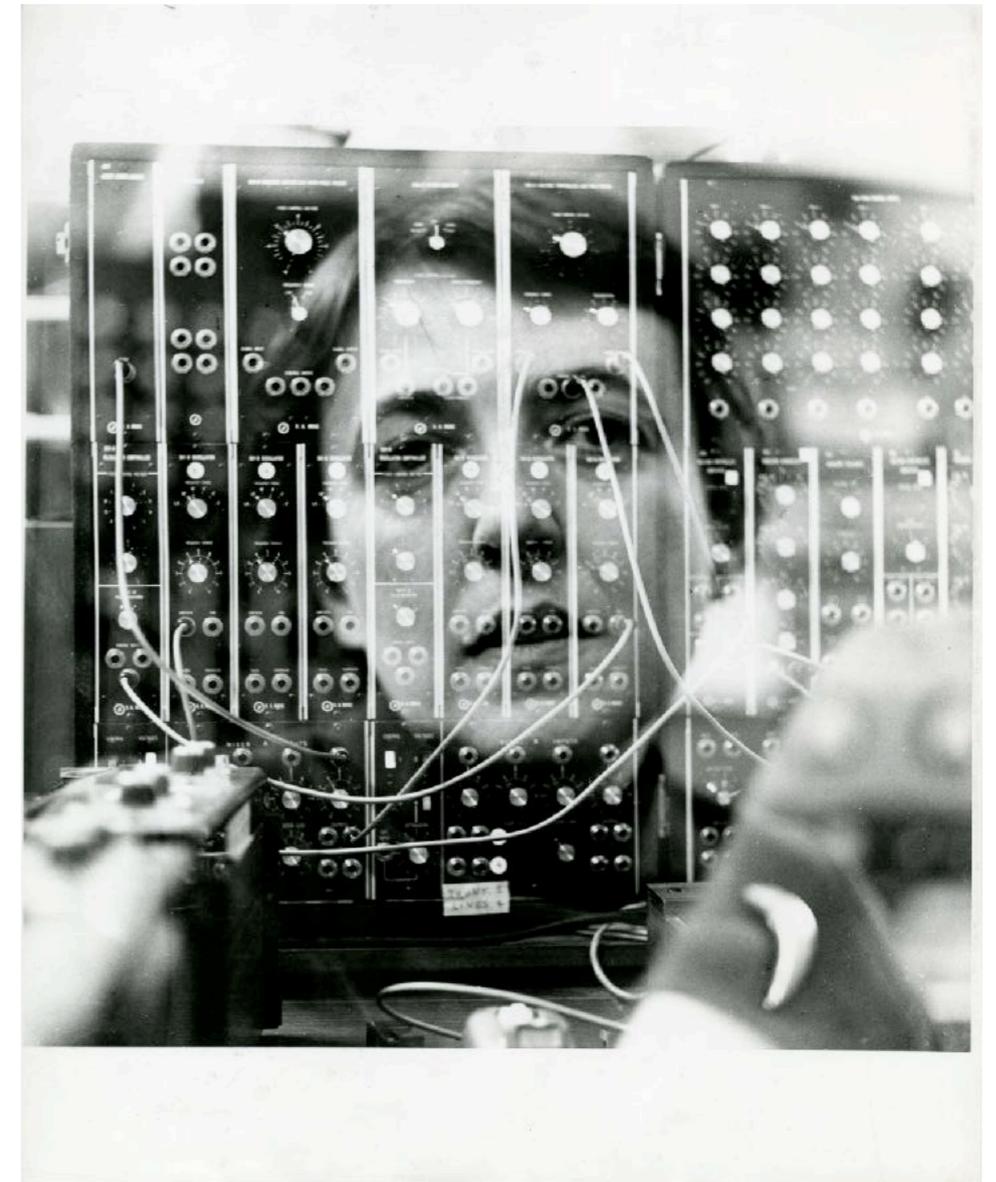
**Francis Frost** is an independent scholar with over twenty five years of experience in researching and studying American art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He has been involved with the Rhode Island Historical Society's drop scene restoration project for almost two years, helping design and develop web pages to aid with fundraising for the digital restoration, as well highlighting the completed project, and has carried out wide-ranging research on the history of the drop scene. Contact: [ffrost@rihs.org](mailto:ffrost@rihs.org)

# Conservatory Students Explore the Work of an Electronic Music Pioneer

## Matt Testa

In 1967, composer Jean Eichelberger Ivey (1923-2010), using her own tape recorders and some borrowed prototype Moog equipment, gave what was probably the first ever workshop in electronic music for school teachers, held at the Peabody Institute's summer session. As Ivey recalled in a 1982 lecture, "Those first students, all public schoolteachers, scarcely knew what they were getting into." It is equally likely that the Peabody Institute itself did not know what to expect by offering the summer workshop in 1967 and 1968. By fall 1969, Ivey had convinced the Institute's administration to build an actual electronic music studio, the first of its kind in a conservatory. More than 50 years later, the electronic music program that Ivey launched and chaired for many years has evolved into a computer music department and nurtured the creation of countless innovative works. A 2022 course at the Peabody Conservatory on women in electronic music introduced Ivey's work to a new generation of music students, who explored the composer's archival papers and recently digitized recordings at the Institute's Arthur Friedheim Library.

Ivey began her compositional career in the 1950s writing acoustic music that was mostly tonal and neoclassical in style. She credited a lecture by Milton Babbitt and Vladimir Ussachevsky that she attended in 1963 for sparking an interest in electronic music, which she then pursued by earning a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition at the University of Toronto. Most of her work starting from the mid-1960s combined electronic sounds with live musicians. *Pinball*, a 1965 musique concrète work for tape featuring manipulated sounds of pinball machines, was written to accompany a short film of the same name by Wayne Sourbeer. A 1973 recording for Folkways Records, *Music by Jean Eichelberger Ivey for Voices, Instruments, and Tape*, features three works for electronics and live musicians, plus her *Cortege* for Charles Kent, a purely electronic piece that was the first to be composed in the Peabody Electronic Music Studio. Ivey directed the studio and taught composition at Peabody until her retirement in 1997.



Composer Jean Eichelberger Ivey in the 1970s. Jean Eichelberger Ivey papers, PIMS.0078, Arthur Friedheim Library Archives, Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University.

The Arthur Friedheim Library Archives finished processing Ivey's papers in 2020 and received a CLIR Recordings at Risk grant the following year to digitize rare or unique recordings featuring Ivey and some of her students and colleagues who specialized in electronic music. Highlights of the collection include a 1973 television documentary about Ivey filmed at Peabody, a 1984 Ivey retrospective concert at Peabody, and video recordings of anniversary concerts by the Peabody Electronic/Computer Music Studio from the 1980s and 1990s. There are also dozens of fragments and early drafts of tape parts for Ivey's music that shed light on the composer's creative process and the tools she worked with. The 239 digitized recordings are now available through the [library's streaming site](#).

In Spring 2022, while the digitization project was nearing completion, Peabody musicology professor Christopher DeLaurenti approached librarian Andrea Morris and myself about introducing the Ivey collection to students of his seminar titled "Pink Noise: Women Making Electronic Music." The class was already studying Ivey and some of her contemporaries, but students were not yet familiar with her archival papers at Peabody, and most had never worked with archival materials of any kind. The digitized recordings were not yet fully processed for access, but the rest of the Ivey collection was available for use.

After Andrea and I introduced archival collections in general, students were then assigned to explore a portion of the Ivey papers and present their findings to the class. Individually or in pairs, they identified some possible materials of interest from the finding aid before making an appointment to access the collection. Some of the topics they chose were targeted questions (e.g., what sort of music did Ivey write for cello?). Others were open-ended, exploring Ivey's identity as a woman in the male-dominated field of electronic music composition and how challenges in her personal life may have influenced her career trajectory. The assignment encouraged students to interpret the materials they encountered through some of the theoretical approaches they had previously discussed in class, including the distinction made by literary theorist Gérard Genette between "text" and "paratext" and the imprecise boundaries between the public and the personal.

There were several insightful presentations where students connected information in a primary source to what they knew about Ivey's life and work. For example, one student found letters revealing Ivey's frustration at not being offered a tenured position. Another student presented a few of Ivey's personal photographs and linked them to how her marriage may have affected her career. These and other classroom observations show that users do not need to have prior experience in archival research to be able to pick up on details in primary sources that may not be obvious to archivists. It's a reminder for an archivist that you can never predict exactly how users may engage with a collection.

The "Pink Noise" seminar will be offered again in spring 2023. Now that the digitized Ivey recordings are all online, students will have access to an even broader selection of materials for their assignments. In late 2023, the Friedheim Library is planning an exhibit about Ivey that will coincide with the 100th anniversary of her birth.

*Matt Testa is the archivist of the Arthur Friedheim Library at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University.*