

Robbie Ewen Fellowship

New York Research Trip & SIBMAS – TLA Conference “Body, Mind, Artifact: Reimagining Collections”

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Report

The financial support from Robbie Ewen Fellowship allowed me the opportunity to spend time in New York, an important international centre for performance and theatre. This funding allowed me not only to be able to attend and co-chair an international conference on theatre research and theatre libraries, museums & archives but also it gave me the chance to make a number of good professional contacts. I not only made new contacts in the higher education sector, the theatre library world but also I made contacts with some performing arts professionals as well. There were also two publishing outcomes from my visit.

The fellowship gave me the opportunity to spend time at New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (NYPLPA). The NYPLPA is really the national theatre collection for the United States. It is an amazing organisation, situated at the heart of New York's theatre district at the Lincoln Centre, next to the Metropolitan Opera House. I had time to explore the collections and understand how they work. I also had time to meet key people involved in the management and the administration of the collections. It was very worthwhile spending time in such a collection and I came back with ideas about how to develop my own collection at The Royal Conservatoire.

In addition to my time spent at NYPLPA I was also involved in a major professional conference, which was very rewarding. The International Association of Libraries and Museums of Performing Arts (SIBMAS) and Theatre Library Association (TLA) joined together for the second time to sponsor an international conference based in the

United States. New York City played host to more than 100 delegates representing multiple continents and more than a dozen countries including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, and Spain. Initial discussions for the conference dated back more than 10 years but due to unforeseen circumstances, the conference planning was delayed. Neither organisation wanted to drop the initiative. Talks about the conference resumed several years ago with President of TLA Nancy Friedland and with myself as Vice President of SIBMAS as co-chairs.

Body, Mind, Artifact: Reimagining Collections was an ambitious conference that took place from June 10 – 13, 2014 at the John Jay College/CUNY. The conference planning team had been at work for more than two years and included members from SIBMAS and TLA. SIBMAS published the conference website. TLA handled registration and some local arrangements. With the social programme being primarily organised from Glasgow & Brussels.

The conference was unique in that it encouraged creative thinking and discussion on three distinct topics. The topics included dance preservation, digital humanities and the performing arts, and material culture and ephemera.

We launched the conference on June 10 at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts with registration and options for exciting excursions scheduled for the morning and afternoon. The New York City community of archivists and curators opened their doors welcoming us to learn about their collections and activities. Conference delegates, including myself, had the opportunity to visit Brooklyn Academy of Music, Carnegie Hall, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Fales Library at New York University, Mark Morris Dance Group, MoMA, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York Philharmonic, Paul Taylor Dance, Roundabout Theatre, and the Shubert Archive.

On Wednesday, June 11, we began the three day programme with a conference keynote delivered by William Ivey Long, one of the most highly regarded American costume designers for theatre and film. Prior to this, he invited a number of us to his studio and we had the opportunity to see first-hand the environment he worked in making the costumes. He gave an engaging keynote which expanded our understanding of his process for designing and his dedication to preserving his own

work as he has his own archive for his work. The keynote was followed by a dynamic plenary session on dance preservation and continued discussion on issues related to dance preservation in the afternoon working sessions. There was great receptivity from SIBMAS and from the TLA membership for this topic as dance preservation is rarely given such attention.

The theme of the second day focused on digital humanities and performing arts. Nic Leonhardt delivered a thought provoking keynote that was followed by plenary papers that examined projects and issues related to digital humanities. The afternoon session on recorded performance provided an opportunity to hear from representatives from Digital Theatre Plus, the Metropolitan Opera and Alexander Street Press on their initiatives for the digitisation and delivery of recorded performance.

Day three focused on material culture and ephemera. Marvin Taylor opened with a provocative and engaging keynote. He challenged the delegates to think about preservation priorities particularly when it comes to non-print materials. A rich plenary session, exhibition session, and working sessions rounded out a robust final day of the conference programme.

In addition to being involved in the organisation of the conference. I also chaired different sessions and delivered my own paper of the changing role of performance / drama librarian in the digital age. This paper will be published in the congress proceedings but also in separate book ***State of the Profession: Performing Arts Librarianship in the 21st Century.***

Simultaneous translation from English to French and French to English was made available to accommodate the French speaking presenters and the significant number of French speaking SIBMAS members. The keynote presenters and plenary papers were videotaped and content is now available via the [TLA Channel on YouTube](#). You can also view the panel which I chaired on Recorded Performance, with speakers from The Met Opera and Digital Theater Plus.

For the full schedule and list of all of the presenters, please visit the conference website. The full conference programme is available in past conference link on the [SIBMAS website](#).

The conference schedule offered exceptional opportunity for socialising as well. With the organisational committee dinner held in the grandeur of the University Club. On the Wednesday, we enjoyed a lovely welcome reception at the Shubert Foundation. We were treated to the terrace with great views of the theatre district and the Hudson River. Many of us later enjoyed the excellent Roundabout Theatre production of CABARET, with Alan Cummings. On the Thursday, we celebrated the [60th anniversary of SIBMAS with a reception](#) – at the French Consulate on 5th Avenue overlooking Central Park in the stunning Salon Rose.

There was great conversation and lovely tributes to SIBMAS. For our closing event, the British Consulate hosted a beautiful reception for us at the British Residence, where I gave a short speech about the work of RCS and its library. SIBMAS and TLA members had a great time together. We had a solid programme that offered an opportunity to learn and share information about our work that is happening all around the globe.

The feedback received during and after the conference has been overwhelmingly positive. This is a time of great change in archives and libraries and having had the opportunity to strengthen a global network of theatre librarians, archivists and curators it enabled us to share international perspectives and efforts on best practices for the collecting and maintaining of performing arts collections.

The conference was supported financially by the Shubert Foundation and the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, without which support we would not have been able to have made the conference happen. The British Consulate, the British Council, City University of New York, Digital Theatre Plus, the French Consulate, Routledge, Alexander Street Press and EBSCO also all supported and helped pay for the conference. New York is a very expensive city to visit and it was really hard to try and fund my own trip and stay on to spend time at NYPLPA. I would also like to thank Robbie Ewen Fellowship for their support in making me a part of this very special event and allowing me time to research the wider world of theatre in New York City, its theatres, museums, libraries and archives. I came away with a greater understanding about my job and my role at Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.



Jan Van Goethem, President SIBMAS, Sylvie François General-Secretary & Alan Jones Vice-President.

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