

Music Preservation and Archiving Today. Edited by Norie Guthrie and Scott Carlson. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. 210 pp. Softcover. \$40.00.

As a lifelong music lover, I was excited to have the opportunity to write a review of *Music Preservation and Archiving Today*. As an archivist not specializing in music preservation, I braced myself for a technical discussion of preservation practices and detailed “how-to” guidelines peppered with technical terms and scientific formulas. Once I began reading, however, I could not put down this great collection of engaging case studies and thoughtful essays. What makes this volume especially useful is its universality. While the title may imply that the book is intended for use by specialists in music archiving and preservation, it will also be valuable for archivists and special collections librarians engaged in a wide variety of fields, as well as musicologists, cultural anthropologists, and fans of music in general.

This book presents a symphony of perspectives, practices, and approaches to collecting, preserving, providing access to, and using music archives. The editors achieve this effect by including a diversity of perspectives, both within the archival profession and beyond. In addition to the perspectives of archivists and special collections librarians, the volume benefits from those of researchers, professors, and a sound mastering and restoration engineer. Moreover, the book is not limited to music archiving and preservation by academic institutions and professional archivists. In addition to examining archivist-curated collections, it provides examples of a range of “community-sourced memory projects,” including private collections, fan-curated websites, and bootleg compilations of music (p. 171).

Part 1, “Documenting Local Music Communities,” discusses collecting, donor relations, and community outreach strategies as practiced by four distinct institutions, presenting an array of collecting methodologies. Andy Leach and Jennie Thomas write about collecting and preserving the popular music of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio through the NEO Sound initiative at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Library. When describing the collecting scope, the authors indicate that it was intentionally narrowed down to a number of specific genres, “to keep [the project] from becoming too exhaustive and unmanageable” (p. 6). Similarly, Norie Guthrie discusses defining the scope of the Houston Folk Music Archive at Fondren Library’s Woodson Research Center at Rice University by making it more focused (p. 28). Conversely, Megan Fraser and Melissa Haley of the University of California, Los Angeles, write about their decision to broadly define “punk” music and culture “to spend more time collecting and making connections and less time debating” whether a particular band fit within the definition and collection scope (p. 49). Finally, Rory Grennan, Katherine Nichols, and Scott Schwartz of the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign used functional areas rather than genres to define their collecting scope.

Approaches to developing a collections policy also differ between the institutions and include establishing a regular advisory board (University of Illinois), engaging donors and community members as informal advisors (Rice University), and relying solely on in-house expertise (Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and UCLA). Documenting the music

scene is a unifying element of the case studies. Regardless of differences in scope, methodology, and strategy, all four chapters discuss documentation of performance venues as well as viewing business and fan communities as an integral part of music archiving and preservation. We also learn the donor relations and community outreach methods used by the authors to build collections and create awareness about their archives, including organizing scanning days and other events, developing web pages, and creatively using social media. To build trust within a community, some archivists engage in truly unique approaches to outreach. For example, Guthrie opens her chapter by describing how she used her bartending duties to work as an archivist, unobtrusively engaging the music's stakeholders while serving them drinks at an outreach event. This is an intriguing overture to one of the most interesting pieces in the book. Such examples reinforce the universal nature of the book (part 1 in particular) and the applicability of the strategies across types of institutions.

The three entries included in the second part of the volume, "Leveraging Archival Materials," were all written by nonarchivists and discuss "how others view [archival] materials and how they can be used" (p. xiii). In chapter 1, Andrew K. Klein of the Houston Folk Music Archive presents a case study of teaching students with primary sources using music archives. In his teaching, Klein goes beyond the typical "show-and-tell" sessions, encouraging students to find materials that support or complicate what they have learned in class prior to visiting the archives. Klein's goal was to make students develop a methodology of research rather than simply identifying "related" materials. It is a wonderful case study, but the omission of one detail was disappointing. Twice in his chapter, Klein mentions the archivist who originally reached out to him about using the Houston Folk Music Archive for his class. That same archivist prepared the materials for the class visit and—during the actual visit—"provided an introduction to the Houston folk scene, discussed its influence on later artists, and described the contents of the archival materials" (p. 70). Klein could have recognized this hardworking archivist by mentioning her by name in his article.

Jessica Thompson's chapter on sonics preservation, "Mastering the Sonics of Historic Media," is an ode to noise. Thompson makes a powerful case for recognizing and distinguishing between contextual and "junk" types of noise. A Grammy-nominated sound engineer, Thompson refers to her role as that of an "engineer and archaeologist." She views an audio recording as both a sonic performance and a historical object that, similar to any archival material, carries important contextual marks of provenance, creation, custodial history, and use (p. 85). These marks, or fingerprints, as Thompson calls them, are in the contextual noise.

Jesse Jarnow's enthusiasm for 1960s counterculture comes through on every page of his chapter. However, Mark McCloud's private collection of materials on LSD culture, the "Institute of Illegal Images," strikes me as an odd example of music preservation in the context of this volume. To be fair, Jarnow admits that McCloud's collection "fails nearly every test in terms of traditional 'archival' usefulness, yet it stubbornly exists" (p. 93), but he also claims that, by its sheer existence, McCloud's collection is "like LSD and mysticism, capable of bypassing accumulated wisdom and providing direct access to

the experience itself” (p. 94). I have a difficult time grasping this logic. In my experience, access and use are rarely the result of mysticism. The sheer existence of the private collection of (presently) controversial items does not crescendo to a countercultural revolution, nor does it serve as an example of “functional community memory,” such as the fan-based collecting, curating, and sharing of Grateful Dead recordings and culture that the author describes in the chapter’s second half.

The third and final part of the compilation, “Outsider Music Preservation,” continues the theme of nontraditional collecting and curation; however, the title does not quite reflect its contents. The essays discuss the phenomenon of “non-archival,” “non-professional,” sometimes barely legal, do-it-yourself preservation. In other words, they examine the very communities that the previous chapters view as integral to the music itself: audiences, devoted fans, unofficial genre experts, and (even if bootleg) publishers.

Anthony Kwame Harrison’s chapter, “Preserving Underground Hip-Hop Tapes in Ethnographic Context,” opens a window into the world of an expert private curator concerned with provenance, context and preservation, description, and potential future access to his collection. With regard to preservation, like Thompson, Harrison recognizes the importance of preserving contextual noise, or the “noncorporate sincerity” of “dirty” sounds (p. 106). Concerning access, Harrison openly discusses his personal concerns regarding prohibited public access to his collection; reflecting on the benefits of his decision to keep the collection private instead of donating it to an institution and making it publically accessible. While his collection remains private, Harrison has taken steps toward making it partially accessible; for example, by curating and publishing “Resurrect the Cassette,” a mix that includes rare items from the collection.

In their chapter on preservation in the “do-it-yourself music community,” Norie Guthrie and Scott Carlson describe the failed—by the authors’ own admission—Indie Preserves archival outreach project, “designed to provide independent record labels with the necessary know-how to preserve their life’s work” (p. 122). The results of the project deliver eminent lessons in community relations and engagement and warn of the danger of prioritizing the needs of the institution over those of the community; lessons that can be applied to any type of archival material.

In his chapter, Jeremy Berg discusses the phenomenon of small labels reissuing obscure music as a form of preservation and compares this with preservation by institutional archives, finding more commonalities than one would expect. For example, in both cases, the mission is preservation of the rare and obscure. Of course, striking differences exist as well. Berg describes different models of music reissue the labels employ, including bootleg releases. The author carefully weighs the pros of reissues—including digital preservation, providing streaming services for easier access, providing less expensive copies of unique recordings, and promoting newer, unknown artists—against the cons, such as uneven quality of recordings, dependence on personal tastes of the compilers, and depriving artists of royalties. Berg concludes that “it may be kind of messy, but it works” (p. 152).

In the final chapter, Scott Carlson continues the theme of bootleg compilation and

distribution of music as preservation. Carlson uses terms such as “activist archiving,” “rogue preservation,” “citizen archiving,” and “fan archivism” when arguing for bootleg preservation. He also recognizes the problems arising from lack of a comprehensive approach to collecting and not abiding by copyright law. For example, when describing compilations of punk and garage music, “communities typically consist of white men preserving the work of other white men” (p. 167). Citing Richard J. Cox, Carlson invites archivists to focus on being educators, advisers, and advocates when it comes to bootleg preservation.¹

To summarize, *Music Preservation and Archiving Today* presents a well-composed set of case studies that offer practical ideas for music collection development, music preservation, and collections use. Furthermore, it provides insights into realms rarely examined by archivists, such as private collecting and bootleg distribution. Bravo!

Olga Virakhovskaya
Lead Archivist for Collections Management
Bentley Historical Library
University of Michigan

NOTE

1. Richard J. Cox, “Digital Curation and the Citizen Archivist,” in *Proceedings of DigCCurr2009: Digital Curation: Practice, Promise, and Prospects*, ed. Helen R. Tibbo et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 102–9.