Using archival material to study performing arts and audience reception

Presentation for CANA / ENGL / THEA 4501
January 23, 2017

Creighton Barrett
Dalhousie University Archives
Today’s agenda

1. Issues in performing arts archives
2. Overview of Dalhousie theatre archives
3. Accessing archival material for your assignment
4. Citing archival material
Performing arts archives
Issues in performing arts archives

1. Temporality and ephemerality

2. Performing arts as process

3. Representation of performance

Temporality and ephemerality

“Theatre is an ephemeral art; once ended, a production leaves only a few traces by which we can measure its characteristics, its quality, and its contributions to the cultural life of the community in which it took place.”

“This assignment invites you to complete original primary research, using archival sources to encounter the traces left behind by productions from Nova Scotia’s theatre companies.”
Performing arts as process

This maquette was held on deposit for a number of years and then returned to Neptune Theatre in 2009.
Representation of performance

This maquette was held on deposit for a number of years and then returned to Neptune Theatre in 2009.
Theatre archives at Killam Memorial Library

Early 1970s: “The Neptune Theatre Archives has been established in the Killam Memorial Library. The Theatre Collection is now being expanded to include other theatres, drama groups, music societies, etc...of Halifax and Nova Scotia.”

Evidence of artistic process in the Neptune Theatre fonds

Photograph of rehearsal of Neptune Theatre’s 1974 production of Godspell, Neptune Theatre fonds, MS-3-1, PC3 Box 4, Folder 16, Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
Broad coverage of visual and performing arts

Featured fonds

1. Neptune Theatre fonds
2. Pier One Theatre fonds
3. David Renton fonds
4. Linda Moore fonds
5. Catherine Banks fonds
Accessing archival material
Normally, you have to search and browse…
Karen Gross reviewing records from Neptune Theatre’s 1977 production of *King Lear* (Photograph taken in 2013 by Creighton Barrett)

We will provide an initial set of archival records for each production
Access archival material

1. Hours: 11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday

2. Drop in and request records for the production you have selected (e.g., “Can I have the records for Neptune Theatre’s 1988 production of Blood Relations?”)

3. Request additional files in person or by email: archives@dal.ca

4. Include “reference codes” or use “clipboard” feature to save a list of search results as a PDF and attach your list

Tip: Give yourself enough time to review all of the files in your production.

Archives staff cannot retrieve additional files after 4:00 p.m.
Tips: If you are using a digital camera or mobile phone to photograph documents, write the full "reference code" on a small strip of paper and make sure the strip of paper is included in the photograph.

It will help when you need to cite your sources!

Archives and Special Collections Reading Room

1. Strict no food or drink policy
2. Pencils only
3. View materials one folder at a time
4. No flash photography
Guide to archival research

1. Comprehensive guide for first-time and experienced researchers

2. Tips for first-time archives researchers:  
   http://dal.ca.libguides.com/c.php?g=257178&p=1717152

3. How to search the Archives Catalogue:  
   http://dal.ca.libguides.com/c.php?g=257178&p=1717150

4. How to browse the Archives Catalogue:  
   http://dal.ca.libguides.com/c.php?g=257178&p=1717151
Archives document delivery service

1. Students, faculty, and staff can request free digital copies of files and items found in the Archives Catalogue and Online Collections

2. Log into Document Delivery Request Form and submit an “Archives Request”

3. See “Guide to Archival Research” for more information about eligible and ineligible material, turnaround times, and instructions on completing the archives request form

Tip: do not rely on the archives document delivery service if you are in a pinch for time. The free service can take up to two weeks depending on staff availability.
Citing archival material
Citing archival material

1. **Chicago footnote or endnote for “ephemera”**: Poster for Dalhousie Student Union event, "In Search of the Supernatural," 1986, MS-1-Ref, Box 16, Folder 27, Dalhousie University Reference Collection, Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.


Visit our citation guide: http://dal.ca.libguides.com/archivalresearch/citation

Tip: Always check with your professor to confirm preferred citation style.
Questions?
Feedback, please!

“Canada hosts relatively few theatrical archives, so Canadian students rarely have the chance to experience the exciting process of primary theatre research. Please make the most of this opportunity, dig in to the archives and feel free to give us lots of feedback on how we can improve your experience!”