STEPPING UP IN A LOW-LEVEL JOB
PARAPROFESSIONALS AND STUDENTS PROCESSING THE LEONARD BERNSTEIN COLLECTION

Presented by Eric Fisher and Lisa Wollenberg
Annual Meeting of the Midwest Chapter, Music Library Association
October 15, 2016
INTRODUCTION

• Leonard Bernstein
  • Spent some time at IU in Bloomington in the 80s, composing and working with the students
• How we obtained the collection
  • In 2009, the Bernstein family contacted the Jacobs School of Music to donate the contents of his studio in Fairfield, CT
• Grammy Museum
  • The school was contacted in preparation for the centennial of Bernstein’s birth year (1918)
  • Museum is putting together a worldwide tour of a Bernstein exhibit
  • Want to use items from our collection in the exhibit
  • Wanted a list of what we have, but we had no list
  • We needed to get everything inventoried ASAP, but didn’t have a librarian or archivist to do the work
• Previous inventory work
  • Items had been moved several times since we originally received the collection
    • No organization of materials was done in the moves
    • Items in boxes, tubes, and loose on shelves
  • Several attempts were made to inventory the contents, but projects were never finished
  • With the moves, items that had already been described, labeled, and photographed were missed in with everything else—this caused problems.
    • Some items were renumbered by mistake
    • Conflicting information on spreadsheets
  • I was asked if I wanted to work on the project in the Spring of 2015.
STUDENT SKILL #1: GATHERING INFORMATION

- Original information received with the collection.
- Multiple spreadsheets from previous attempts.
- Photographs from previous attempts.

- We had a spreadsheet that came with the collection that had descriptions and other data about many of the items, though not all
- We had multiple spreadsheets from the previous attempts to inventory collection
- Along with those spreadsheets, we had photos of some of the objects, some good, some not so good
- Labels had been set up on the shelves in our vault to provide locations for the items
- We used one of the spreadsheets that had been already started and tailored it for our project
- I started at the very beginning, much of which had already been done, but not everything
  - I had to check to see if each item was labeled, if it had a description on spreadsheet, and if we had a photo
  - If not, I labeled, described, and photographed.
• One of the skills I learned while working on this project, which went above my standard student circulation worker duties, was handling and labeling the various materials in the collection.

• We had a variety of materials:
  • Framed photos
  • Wooden plaques
  • Clothing
  • Luggage
  • Metal items
  • Office supplies

• Learned how to label appropriately from our former Head of Public Services, Carla Williams, who had experience in archival processing.
LABELING ITEMS: PAPER/CARDBOARD

- Light pencil to label bottom right corner of back

- For paper/cardboard-type items, used a light pencil to label the bottom right corner of the back
LABELING ITEMS: WOOD/HARD MATERIALS

- Small patch of clear nail polish and fine black marker to label lower right corner of back

- For wood, metals, and other hard materials, used a small patch of clear nail polish and a fine-tip black marker to write the inventory number
LABELING ITEMS: CLOTH

Stitch a cloth tag with the item number on lower right corner of back or in hidden area

• For cloth items, loosely stitched a cloth tag with the inventory number written on it in a hidden place on the item
• After labeling, if there was a description in the original spreadsheet, used that for description in our new spreadsheet
  • If not, wrote a description of item
• Took photos of the item
  • Usually just one
  • Sometimes more if there were different angles that needed to be shown, or if items opened, etc.
• Made sure to note in the spreadsheet the location number of where the item was in the vault
• Time was critical, so there was not enough time to re-take any photos from previous projects if they weren’t great quality
  • Also no time to re-group or organize the items physically, just had to keep them where they were on the shelves
• After completing the item inventory (minus books and recordings), it was time to test our system
STUDENT SKILL #3: FULFILLING PATRON REQUESTS

- List of items from Grammy Museum
- Located items using the system
- This test run showed some flaws in the system:
  - Items not always in order
  - Items in tubes difficult to retrieve

- We now had a list of items we could give to the Grammy Museum
- Bob Santelli, Executive Director of the museum came with a list of items from the spreadsheet that he wanted to look at
- Our list had shelf numbers and item numbers, so I was able to locate everything he wanted relatively easily—it worked!
- Some problems with the system:
  - Items not always in order: sometimes had to just pull everything from the shelf to locate one item—but it was always there somewhere
  - Some items in the tubes or stacked with many other items in boxes, were not always easy to retrieve, or put back
STUDENT BENEFITS

- Experience library jobs beyond the student circulation work
- Special handling of materials/archival procedures
- Presentation opportunities
- Good for resume

• Get a chance to experience jobs in the library that I don’t get to see working as a student circulation worker
  • Since I’m now working on my MLS degree, this was a good chance to get a glimpse of special collections job options
• Was able to learn some archival procedures
• Experience working on a project that had already been started: how to handle and incorporate work already begun
• Also allowed me to have presentation opportunities: Midwest MLA, also one for the IU library system
• Great addition to my resume
PARAPROFESSIONAL SKILL #1:
DUBLIN CORE

- Omeka
- Convert spreadsheets
  - Transfer existing information from free description to Dublin Core
  - Improve and add information
  - Create new entries for sound recordings, books, periodicals, and scores

(First, I should explain that I’m currently working as a paraprofessional, but I have completed my MLS, so I have the professional education, just not the title or the experience of a real librarian. The same goes for my colleague, Charley Roush, who also worked on this project.)

• Our initial idea to get the collection visible online was to create a collection in Omeka
• I took a basic intro to Omeka class, and did some playing around on my own in Omeka to get a better feel for it and figure out what we needed to do
• I created new spreadsheets
  - Converted old spreadsheet info from big blocks of description to Dublin Core (creator, date, location, etc.)
  - Created new descriptive information
    - From items already described in old spreadsheet—some were only partially described. I looked at the photos, sometimes dumped the text into Google Translate to get a better idea of what the item was
    - Created all new information for the sound recordings, books, periodicals, and scores
• The idea was that these spreadsheets could be uploaded to Omeka, and all the information would be immediately online and ready to go
• Then we met with the Omeka contact person at the main library, and he suggested IU Archives Online as a possibly better alternative—we ultimately agreed with him
• To create a finding aid in IU Archives Online, it has to be encoded in EAD, which is like XML for archivists
• At the time, the online person at the music library who knew EAD was a part-time student worker helping out with converting some old finding aids to EAD. She didn’t have time to take on another huge project
• In summer 2016 I audited an EAD workshop, which was a class through the Department of Information & Library Science
• I then worked with Nick Homenda from IU Archives, who magically transformed my Dublin Core spreadsheets to EAD
• I encoded the collection-level information (scope/content note, provenance, etc.)
• I also worked with the item-level information from Nick’s EAD files.
  • Some of the information could be transferred to more specific EAD tags (e.g. information in the Notes tag could be separated into physical description or extent)
  • My spreadsheets had names in regular order, but they were transformed to reverse order in the EAD file, which created problems:
    • Philharmonic, New York
    • Jr., James Magner
  • Spreadsheets were set up for Omeka, where all of the items are just in one big group
    • EAD allows you to group similar items, so I re-ordered many of the items into groups and sub-groups
PARAPROFESSIONAL SKILL #3:
COLLABORATION

- Music Library staff
- IU Archives staff
- EAD workshop professor
  (Lilly Library archivist)

• I did a lot of collaboration through the project. Most of that was obviously with music library staff
  • Phil Ponella: Head of the library, so he has a large say in what should be done, and he’s also the one who’d had the most contact with the Bernstein family and with the Grammys
  • Eric: Had the most hands-on experience with the actual items
  • Charley Roush: Another circulation supervisor: Had overseen Eric, as well as a few other student workers and volunteers who helped put together the inventory spreadsheet
  • Tech Services: Needed their help in creating a catalog record for the collection
• We also collaborated with IU Archives staff
  • Initial consultation: They asked a lot of questions about what we had, what had been done already, and what we wanted to do
  • Nick: Asked for his helping when his transformed EAD files weren’t quite what I wanted, and also when I needed help with technical questions/troubleshooting, e.g. with how the EAD file was displaying on the user end
• Also asked for help from EAD workshop professor
  • Craig Simpson, archivist at the Lilly: helped answer questions that had to do with making decisions about how to actually encode things
• Other than the music library staff, these are all people that work in other buildings and otherwise I probably would’ve never met them, much less worked with them
PARAPROFESSIONAL BENEFITS

- Enhance resume
- New technical skills
- Experience with large special/archival collection
- Conference presentations

- The greatest benefit of this project for me was that it really beefed up my resume, to help me get a professional librarian job
- Tech skills: Omeka, Dublin Core, EAD (similar structure to HTML/XML, just different tags)
  - Those are specialized skills, so not as many librarians know how to do them
  - I may use these skills in a later job, or at least have a better understanding of how they function for when I need to work with tech people/archivists in the future
- Have experience handling archival materials—very large archival special collection
  - Most libraries have special collections or at least gifts to deal with—most likely will have to do something similar at some point in my career
- Can present at conferences!
  - We first presented at the IU Libraries In-House Institute, a mini (one-day) conference for all IU Libraries staff
  - Now we’re presenting here
  - We have a poster session upcoming at MLA in Orlando
PROJECT UPDATE

- Items in number order (mostly)
- Find better storage options
- May redo photographs
- May create separate Omeka exhibit
- Finding aid almost complete
  - Preview version

- We now have physically re-ordered the items on the shelves, so they’re mostly in numerical order and all in one location (other than very large or small items that had to be separated out
  - Will be much easier to find things for patrons
- Still on the to-do-list
  - Find better storage options
    - Especially for posters, most of which are rolled up in tubes: Map storage would be great, but we don’t have those shelving units, and we’d have to find a place to put them
    - May re-do photographs: We’d like to post all the photos online, but since most aren’t professional quality, they need to be re-done first
    - May eventually create one or more Omeka exhibits to feature certain items, e.g. all the items relating to Bernstein’s Mass
- But good news! The finding aid is almost complete
  - Still need to add shelving locations for many of the items, now that they’re reordered on the shelves
  - There’s still a little more set-up that needs to be done before it can be published, but can show you the preview...
LESSONS LEARNED

- Planning
  - Collaborate earlier
  - Save time later
- Consistent procedures
- Non-librarians are pretty awesome

• Things we wish were done differently
  • Planning: Collaborate earlier to save time later
    • I wish we had figured out what kind of finding aid we wanted before making the
      inventory—would’ve helped structure the inventory, and only would’ve had to create
      one spreadsheet instead of many.
    • Collaborate with archival staff sooner in the process: Can help with ideas for
      processing, how to handle materials, how to set up inventory—what needs to be
      done, how, in what order, etc.
  • Consistent procedures
    • Spreadsheet mess: Before starting inventory, we should’ve had a clear set of
      instructions to follow
    • Or at least have someone who can do the whole thing start to finish so they would
      (hopefully) do things consistently
    • Since we didn’t, we ended up re-doing and re-re-doing a lot of work because we
      didn’t know what had or had not been done
  • Final lesson learned: Students and non-librarian staff can get a lot of work done, and can do a good
    job!
    • After 7 years of this stuff sitting in our basement, we now (finally) have a full inventory,
      everything shelved in order, and a public finding aid so researchers can actually use the
      materials