



Taking back the stage: interventions in the performing arts library of the 21st century

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Publication Date	2016
Publisher	Theatre Library Association

Taking Back the Stage:

Interventions in the Performing Arts Library of the 21st Century

BARRY HOULIHAN

In conversation in 1961, the playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett said, "To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now."¹ That ever-ongoing quest for playwrights, actors, and other performance artists alike must today also apply to the performing arts librarian. The question of "form" is one which is occupying the minds, processes, approaches, and scholarship of librarians and archivists ever more so in the present than perhaps at any other time in the profession.

The performing arts archive is morphing in content, format, and context. Today, performances and productions exist as a multiplicity of interconnected components. These can consist of literary, document, artistic, design, and technological inputs, which Sodja Lotker outlined as being a "total fragmentation" and describes as "the separation of not only scenes, ideas and themes but of performance itself into different places, spaces and times as well as fragmentation of the audience." (Crawley, White, eds., p. 197)² Taken from a collection of essays titled, *No More Drama*, edited by Willie White and Peter Crawley, authors such as Christian Kühl highlight the challenges of documenting contemporary theatre such as in continental Europe, with a style that moves from site-specific, to verbatim/documentary, to technologically produced, to other more "traditional" theatre styles, all which Kühl calls "a live archive of the everyday." (Crawley, White, eds. p. 29)³

With this in mind, and with theatre practitioners and scholars re-defining their own requirements for accessing and utilizing the documented theatre record, the archive and archivist must react accordingly. Practices in access, ethics, usage, and preserving the performance archive has become an act of mediation between the traditional and the digital, a struggle between what is present and what never was present. Tracy C. Davis, in referring to the work of Diana Taylor, discusses this idea of preserving an intangible cultural heritage, in a model utilized by UNESCO, where the role of performance is recognized in preserving and conveying social memory and identity, but in a non-document based form, rather an embodied remembering in a corporeal sense. (Davis, p. 3)⁴ This non-corporeal engagement with the memory of performance is mirrored in the digital archive, where the documented and collected information is disembodied, set aside from its archival body (book, program, poster), and accessed in the virtual realm. Emerging technologies will redefine the way the theatre archive is not only accessed, but where it is accessed, for what reasons, in what context, and in what format.

This paper will look at examples of how managing and curating performing arts archives are undergoing rapid redefinition, but with exciting new opportunities as well as challenges. The object of desire or target of achievement may not be to counteract a "total fragmentation," as outlined by Lotker, but instead to recognize it, harness it, and in turn unify the fragments, which will then present the archive user with an accessible and navigable archival record that conforms with professional standards and represents a gateway between the traditional and the digital.

Ongoing projects at the James Hardiman Library, National University of Ireland, Galway, such as the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive Project and the cataloging of the Druid Theatre Company archive, as well as managing an increasingly large and diverse range of theatre collections, will allow for intensive working case studies and for development of expertise in changing skill sets for archivists and researchers alike. These challenges are changing the face of theatre scholarship in Ireland, and through expanding technologies will open these projects to a global audience. How we face these changes will

determine how we shape future access, research, and understanding through preserving and presenting the archival record.

Identifying the Changes

Writing in *The Drama Review* in 1970, Umberto Eco discussed the formation of theatre through his theoretical writing on semiotics of performance:

Theatre is, among the various arts, the one in which the whole of human experience is co-involved, the very place in which complete “son et lumière” events take place, in which human bodies, artefacts, music, literary expressions (and therefore literature, music, painting, architecture and so on) are in play at the same moment . . . (Eco, p. 108)⁵

Referencing other commentators such as Tadeusz Kowzan, who broke down into thirteen elements the building blocks of performance, including: words, voice, inflection, facial mimicry, gesture, body, movement, makeup, headdress, costume, accessory, stage design, lighting, music, and noise—and others who have pointed out that the object of theatrical semiotics is the performance, or the *mise-en-scène*, not the literary text, Eco does not subscribe to a mathematical equation to which some or all of the above elements can be simply added, subtracted, or multiplied, and result in a theatrical performance. Instead, this form of visualization of performance into separate and identifiable elements allows the archivist a map by which to document the totality of performance, its tone, style, design, context, movement, and even its emotive and physical reception. The key to understanding this argument made by Eco in the late 1970s is still valid today, and that is to formulate and understand a language of the performance archive. We must know and feel the DNA of the production from its first inception to its last production.

The elements of performance are a fluid force from which theatre develops. The influence and input of writers, directors, designers, actors, and technologists are being reconfigured as all are recognized as being contributors. As collections, people, events, and places are linked in the archive through open access metadata, networked find-

ing aids, and increased digital access and searchability, the idea of provenance must remain a central ideal for the archivist mediating between performance records and formats.

The power of the archive, or the sum of all these parts, has the power to counteract, change, and correct perceived histories and narratives. Lionel Pilkington's article (2004) incisively posits the case for Irish theatre history to look beyond the blinkered view of an "institutional" Irish theatre history:

Focusing exclusively on the idea that theatre consists of the performance of scripted plays in an institutional context, it conveys an approach that insists on the natural separation and independence of theatre from other forms of cultural performance (such as mumming, pageantry, processions, political demonstrations) that subordinates the material context of theatrical production to textual analysis, that treats theatre protests as dangerously or philistinely illegitimate, and that views the Irish theatre as beginning with the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre in May 1899. The principal achievement of Irish theatre scholarship over the last fifteen years is the steady dismantling of each of these assumptions. (Pilkington, p. 725)⁶

Changes in managing the performance arts archive have been recently examined in a report by Francesca Marini titled, "Archivists, Librarians and Theatre Research" (2007)⁷, in which she outlines findings of research, interviews, and surveys with theatre librarians and archivists, and which offers several interesting points and findings under headings such as context, time, engagement, and sources sought by researchers and interdisciplinary in usage. As Marini sums up her findings, "These [theatre] archives and libraries have a variety of users. University students in several fields and disciplines—for example, performing arts, the arts, architecture, and fashion design—working on theses and dissertations compose one large group." (Marini, p. 30)

From experiences of working on cataloging and making available a wide range of theatre and performance archives, being a primary contact point for researchers and working as part of the Archives and Special Collections service team at the Hardiman Library, I have experienced the following identifiable changes in accessing, engaging, and using the performance arts archives:

Changes in Usage and Expectations: Performance Archive

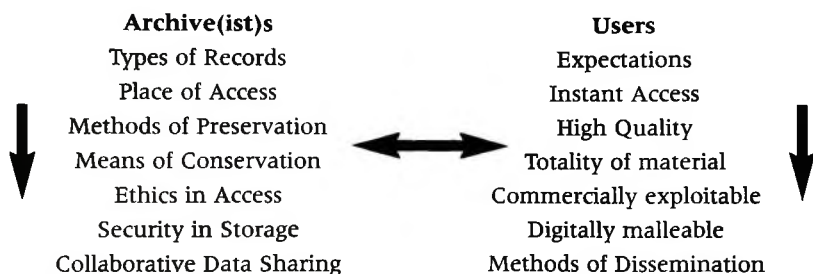


Figure 1. Flowchart of changes in managing the performing arts archive.

To expand on the above table, interventions between the archive and curator are themselves changing, as well as the place, context, and extent of these interventions. The types of records being appraised and accessioned are undergoing scrutiny of identity and presence. This creates a space where the archivist straddles being a mediator and/or (co-) creator of the archive itself. Writing in *Archival Science*, Terry Cook defined this changing landscape in archival selectivity:

This dichotomy between evidence and memory has fuelled controversies in recent years that have divided archivists over such fundamental functions as appraisal and description; over approaches to such seemingly contentious issues as electronic or digital records, documentation strategies, and reference and outreach activities; or, more basically, over the nature of archival education and thus the very characteristics of what makes an ideal archivist at the beginning of the twenty-first century. (Cook, p. 102)⁸

The place of access, with a transition towards the digital space, also determines the necessity for a collaborative and technical prowess for integration, consistency, and interoperability of digital objects and metadata.

In context of the digital archive, the place of intervention is now in “the cloud” as much as it used to be in the physical storage room or repository. Natalie Esling adds that “the transition to digitisation exposes an expansion to the idea of the archive and its relationship to the preservation on contemporary history.” (2013, p. 32)⁹ These types of records are undergoing and experiencing change. Docu-

mented correspondence previously accounted for in manuscript or typescript is, disturbingly, not commonplace in replication by the presence of e-mail in the archive. Sporadic instances where printouts of e-mail are present will serve only as a signpost for what is missing and extant from the archive, as much as indicate and account for activity.

Those who manage the modern and multi-origin performance archive, i.e., of non-digital records, digitized records, and born-digital records, include an increasing number of contributors and varying skill sets and expertise. At NUI Galway, this encompasses archivists, digital archivists, librarians, academics, marketing staff, digital and project managers, to name but a few. The intervention by all those who engage with and manage these archives is beginning long before the archives reach the archive.

Theatre Entering the Archive—the Present as Past

In the introduction by Fintan Walsh to the edited collection of essays reacting to theatre in contemporary Ireland titled, *That Was Us*, a line taken from the site-specific production, *The Boys of Foley Street*, by Anu Productions (itself based on a series of documentaries of the same name on RTÉ Radio in 1975, 1988, and 2008), Walsh examines how we as an audience, geographically, spatially, and temporally *live* a performance.

In this moment and in the production that follows, life is not so much represented to us, as it is *lived* by us. (Walsh, p.1)¹⁰

The Boys of Foley Street was part of “the Monto Cycle” of a site-specific series of plays reconstructing the social and geographic history of an area of inner city Dublin known as The Monto. The series also includes *World’s End Lane*, *Laundry*, and *Vardo*, each production premiering at the Dublin Fringe Festival or Dublin Theatre Festival between 2010 and 2014.

Walsh continues to explain how considering the phrase, “*That Was Us*,” as the book’s title, not just for its symbolism of Celtic Tiger neoliberal excessiveness, but as “it serves to remind us of the ongoing roles theatre and performance have to play in exploring questions of

identity, responsibility and civic participation." This, as Patrick Lonergan reminds us, "the so-called "Celtic Tiger" period of economic growth was matched by what some scholars called "a third Renaissance" in Irish dramatic literature." (Lonergan, p. 22)¹¹

Access to the archive and documented record of performance by online and digital media does offer to democratize access to the Irish theatre record. However, this does raise the question, following from Lonergan's definitions of a globalized Irish theatre, that a globalized Irish theatre archive, comprising the record of international theatre in Ireland and conversely Irish theatre staged abroad, viewed through the digital prism, there is a blurring of nationality and "ownership" of the memory and of the archive. Lonergan describes such cases as the National Theatre of Scotland, established in 2003 and existing without a physical building, "as a move from the 'physical to the conceptual,'" and not defined by the physical space occupied by or within a dedicated home. The archive no longer defined or refined by the strong room walls of the repository is now rather controlled by servers, screens, and passwords.

An archive of performance that exists only on the Internet while its physical counterpart lies extant and "bodyless" from the narrative, places Irish theatre history into this globalized and conceptual space of being "Stateless" and within the shared memory of those who view it anywhere in the world. Lonergan adds that in contemporary Ireland, nationality is more commonly defined by identifying oneself as part of an 'Irish nation,' "which is related to but separate from the physical territory." (Lonergan, p. 21) This theory could be applied to the digital archive which of late is moving into the realm of databases and cyberspace. "Each of these cases involves a relocation of power from a physical to a conceptual space, or a *detritorialization of power*." (Lonergan, p. 21)

Emilie Pine presents this point in her book, *The Politics of Irish Memory* (2011), where she describes a "National" memory of the 19th century in Irish culture and drama which focused on the past in opposition to a then failing present:

By the late nineteenth century, the idea of a lost heroic age and the idea of a distinctive Irish cultural identity reached its apogee in the Gaelic

and Literary Revivals, which aimed to renew this lost identity in the present through promoting the Irish language, Gaelic games, and crucially, myths of the past, in order to build a bridge between the past and an ancient imagined past. (Pine, pp. 5–6)¹²

Pine further discusses, in tandem with this “National” memory, how in contemporary understanding of memory and the archive, there is also a new “international memory.” When allied with Lonergan’s study of the internationalization of Irish theatre, the globalized, “linked in,” and digitized theatre archive presents a model for comprehending the place and context of an “Irish” theatre archive that is both national and international and of the past and present. The interventions taking place today by theatre librarians and archivists are producing a borderless but not stateless performance archive—and that is the crucial difference.

This reminds us of the fundamental elements of the place and role of the archive in a functioning democratic society not just in “living ourselves and our society,” as in *The Monto Cycle*, but by being an advocate of openness, transparency, and also—paradoxically—reflection. This reflection is perhaps an unconsidered element of the composition of the performance archive, where what is documented is primarily what is seen, felt, heard, or experienced by the audience from within their seats of the auditorium. Abbott, Jones, and Ross outline in their essay, “Redefining the Performing Arts Library” (Jones, et al, 2009)¹³ that, “arguably, all archiving is performance: records are surrogates that provide a window onto past moments that can never be recreated, and users interact with these records in a performance to reinterpret this past.” (Jones, et al, p. 166)¹³

In times of recession, as seen in Ireland and crucially in the writing, devising, and staging of new drama during these years, has shown how audiences can in fact consist of just one person out on a city street. There are no plush seats, no lighting rigs, no acoustic sound systems, generally costuming is of the norm associated with that place so as to “function” in that space. In hindsight, it is no real coincidence or surprise that a spike in site-specific and site-responsive work would exist in Ireland post-2007. A central oeuvre of contemporary Irish drama was to react from the ground up: place the drama

on the streets and in dilapidated council flats, parks, monuments, cars, streets, and among inhabitants themselves. Without question the performance archive of the future will be radically different from that on which we have based past experiences and assumptions.

Turning the Archive on Ourselves

The archive can offer reviews of the audience itself. Audiences are a further absence in a broader understanding of past performance via the archive. They are accounted for in abstract and fleeting presences: box office accounts, the target of advertisements in playbills and posters, a silhouetted and ghostly presence in the recorded video of performance itself. In cases like the Druid Theatre Archive in the Hardiman Library, there is rare direct evidence documented from the audience. The production in question was a tour of *Conversations on a Homecoming* by Irish playwright Tom Murphy. The play, set in a pub in a small Irish village in the 1960s, as a returning emigrant from the United States meets his old village friends and drinking buddies, examines the psychology of emigration and captures the economically developing and globally expanding Irish State of the time. The 1987 tour featured performances in three different Irish prisons: Cork, Arbour Hill, and Mountjoy. In the article, "When Druid Went to Jail: Returned Migrants, Irish Prisoners, and Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming*," by Shelley Troupe, she investigates questions posed by:

Isolation. Ostracism. Broken relationships. These are just a few of the consequences faced by both returned migrants and released prisoners. What happens, then, when a professional theatre company presents a play about a returned migrant to people remanded to the prison system? What, if anything, do a group of prisoners glean from such a play, and what is the motivation for the prison system to present such a production? (Troupe, p. 224)¹⁴

Within the Druid Archive at the Hardiman Library are letters of feedback from unnamed prisoners within Arbour Hill Prison. Comments include:

Firstly, I would like to say a big thank you to one and all connected with the bringing this play to the prisons. . . We, the inmates or prisoners if you prefer, appreciated what must have been a very hard and appre-

hensive decision for you to make. Also, the prison staff deserve a clap on the back for making it such a wonderful evening.¹⁵

It's nice to know that not everybody has forgotten about us in here, thanks a million to the cast of Druid Theatre Company.¹⁶

This community of spectators that is underrepresented in the performance archive is explored by Brian Singleton in reference to the new wave of site-specific theatre of the post-Celtic Tiger period in Ireland:

... spectators can see each other and form communities of viewers who feed off each other's engagement with the performance, and provide a component of the scenography with which performances often interact. The role-playing element of the production, with personal choices made by audience members to intervene in a scenario, about whether to

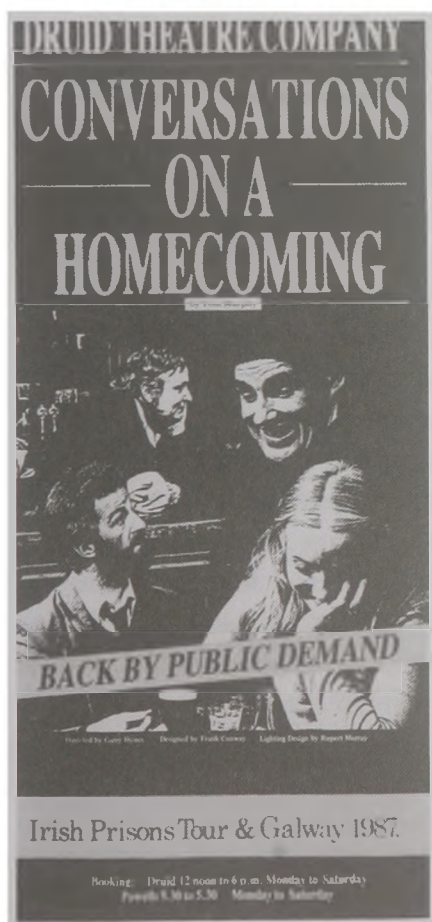


Figure 2: Flier from Druid Theatre Company's production of *Conversations on a Homecoming* by Tom Murphy, 1987.¹⁷

physically engage and touch and or talk to cast members break all traditional boundaries of actor/audience contact. To begin archiving or documenting these types of work is to first of all question where does one even begin? (Walsh, ed., p. 21)¹⁸

The challenges are varied, current, and evolving. To continue to meet these demands in usage, access, and form, the librarian and archivist as mediator must be at the center. The question of “form” upon which Beckett opined, regarding the social, cultural, and artistic milieu is transferrable to the debate of the relevancy of the librarian and archivist. Within the growing field of digital humanities, an emphasis on interdisciplinary scholarship and transferable knowledge between traditionally disparate disciplines is proving to account for a wider field of non-traditional users of performance arts collections.

At the heart of this is digital access to collections, allowing for new gateways to a global network of collections and institutions, and the means and promise for new models of instruction, learning, and access—crucially countering gaps in the historical theatre narrative. The history of theatre is so often the history of the script and playwright. These new opportunities afford a widening of the narrative and inclusion of an extended participatory network, highlighting hidden contributions of designers, scenographers, theatre managers, musicians, stage managers, and others into the foreground of a re-considered narrative.

The performing arts librarian must ensure continued specialization in the field, but with a wider embrace. As theatre reflects what a society experiences, so too must the archive reflect the performance in totality. Therefore, the librarian must manage a collective social and cultural memory. William F. Condee expresses this argument succinctly in his article, “The Future is Interdisciplinary”.¹⁹ By placing the theatre library and archive in tandem with the social, political, and economic record, research can explore unforeseen engagement and collaboration, placing collections and curators in a strategically stronger position with influence over project planning, direct teaching, assessment, and collection knowledge management. The librarian must therefore become teacher, curator, advocate, and activist for the profession and for the collections.

Within today's born-digital era and within the realm of user expectations being higher and more demanding than ever, the rapidly changing forms of access, preservation, and information means that, to paraphrase Beckett, to find a form that accommodates the *mess*, is a most pressing issue and question.

Performance Records and Archival Literacy: Teaching the Archive

Francesca Marini quotes an interview with an Italian performance archivist, who remarked,

The archive has to be alive; it has to be an entity active for everybody . . . If its existence is not known, if it does not co-exist with the city, the people, the scholars . . . it is a dead archive. And theatre cannot be a dead issue; on the contrary, it has to make people understand everything that is out there, convey the possibility to do and discover things. (Marini, p. 29)²⁰

I would argue for a method of teaching archival literacy that advocates for a three-dimensional understanding of the archive and its latent and potential knowledge. Reading the archival sources, such as a script or promptbook can yield a rich stream of knowledge, but by looking at the promptbook in a holistic way can reveal much more. By seeing annotations that relate to an actor's place and position on stage, her movements, entrances and exits, marked on cue, and to coincide with a particular and corresponding movement or verbal signal that tracks the presence, bodily representation of the action, lines, and stage directions that gives the researcher a frame-by-frame account, filling in the void of absent memory of bodily presence in the performance archive.

Similarly can actors' script-in-hand copies or personal rehearsal scripts offer an aural memory where the very inflections, tonal differences, and delivery pitch of sounds, accent, vowels, consonants, clauses, phrases, and sentences can be heard when even the textual records are examined with an aural dexterity. Within the Druid Theatre Archive is a promptscript from Tom Murphy's *Bailgangaire*, meaning "The Town Without Laughter," produced in 1986. The text contains numerous underlinings, scoring, and detailed notation with

syllabic inflections, pronunciations, and auditorium sound effects added by the actress Siobhan McKenna.²¹

Inclusivity towards the body and presence of the actor onstage should extend to other forms of performance including dance, which in an Irish context has existed though pushed to the periphery of our stages, as well as from our wider theatre history and scholarship. For varying reasons, dance deserves its own dedicated forum, where the archive's and archivists' responsibility for this amnesia is examined.

There have been and are specialist repositories for dance records, but these are often as obscured as the performances themselves they document, furthering the absence of records of dance and movement from the examined and studied repertoire. Dance historian Martha Ullman West (2006) writes that:

Long after they leave the stage, in their minds and muscles they hold the memory of form, rhythm, mood and intent, constituting an irreplaceable resource for performers, historians, and frequently the choreographers themselves.²²

With this instinctive knowledge of viewing the archive material, the librarian and archivist can instruct users on how not just to read the documents, but to "hear" and experience them via other perceptions. The form must be interrogated and explored by librarians, archivists, and users alike in a shared reengagement and invigoration of our managing the archive.

At NUI Galway, the Archives and Special Collections service partners with the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance, as well as other disciplines such as English, History, and Irish Studies to deliver practical and research-driven integration of archival material into selected modules, as well as creation of new bespoke modules.

Students can access graduate modules specifically on the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive. Another module titled, "Discover the Archives," is offered through the School of English. A new module dedicated to archival literacy and using archives in research primarily aimed at undergraduate students is currently in development by the Archives team. This integrated approach to archive-led teaching is already paying dividends on the increase in usage of archival collections as well as linked usage, where digital and non-digital collections

are being used in tandem, giving a more holistic and mixed-media study experience.

Gaps in the Narrative—Trusting the Archival Record

In outlining a coherent archival literacy program, users must be made aware of such absences in the narrative. A reliance on the text as infallible is in itself an impossibility as movement through promptscripts, scripts, and alterations through rehearsal to performance to revival makes even that most perceivably consistent element uncertain. Rebecca Schneider highlights how in *Hamlet*, Hamlet himself is panicked about the recording and “re-performing” of his own words:

Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you, tripping on the tongue; but if you mouth it as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke to me. (*Hamlet*, 3.2.1–47)

Schneider adds that Hamlet begs to have his words “set down” and precludes them being altered during a future time:

Shakespeare sets no simple dichotomy here to suggest that text on the page is authentic and fixed while performance is shifty and mobile. The text/performance distinction, so beloved of twentieth and twenty-first century performance studies, doesn’t work here as neatly as it might, at first, seem. In Shakespeare’s own example, and in line with theatrical practice in his day, text is hardly invariable, hardly stable but given to certain ungovernability. (Schneider, p. 86)²³

Documents fall victim to alteration of content, context, and form by the nature of performance, as one promptscript becomes transient between actors who perform the same roles over time. Destruction by accidental means—flooding, fire, erasure, deletion, or intentional damage by theft, or disposal by obsolescence of the format of the digital record—all mean that from the very point of creation, the record is already at risk. If records cannot be opened, accessed, or verified, they again fall into the realm of the dead archive.

With increasing access to the documented and digitized record, the archivist can counteract this obsoleted memory, where even actions and performances never undertaken onstage can have a presence and impact on the performance historiography. An example from the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive is a play that stands out within the



Figure 3. Screenshot of Abbey Theatre Digital Archive for *The Spancel of Death*, Abbey Theatre.²⁴

masses of digital objects and pools of metadata. When searched within the database, *The Spancel of Death* by T. H. Nally returns curiously few items. Normally, a huge range of playbills, fliers, posters, promptscripts, scripts, designs, and audiovisual sources are offered to a reader. Each production is given a chronology and production history. Nevertheless, no such datasets are returned for *The Spancel of Death*.

Two “script-in-hand” texts of character pieces exist. The surviving playbill documents the planned production, containing evidence of paid advertising, accompanied by cast member lists and information that the production was part of a double bill with *Kathleen Ní Houlihan* by W. B. Yeats, are all archival signposts of a typical historic play staged nearly one hundred years ago. Crucially, two pieces of verifiable information are missing: the opening night and premiere venue.

However, a look at the proposed date of production reveals how the social context of the time (April 1916) offers the answer to this conundrum. On the previous day, Monday, 24 April 1916, Dublin and Ireland were celebrating Easter Monday. On this day, groups including the Irish Volunteers, Irish Citizens Army, and *Cumann na mBan* (the women’s organization), with others, began what would

become a futile attempt to gain full Irish independence. The Easter Rising commenced.

The story of the Easter Rising and the Abbey's intertwined history has been reported elsewhere and deserves attention in a wider context, especially during this current "Decade of Commemorations" in Ireland. The Easter Rising had brought Dublin to a standstill, if not affecting the desired breakaway of Ireland from the British Empire. In a letter dated 5 May 1916, St. John Ervine writes to Lady Augusta Gregory, one of the co-founders of the Abbey, to give his account of events, and mentions the killing of Sean Connolly, an Abbey actor, and the whereabouts of Helena Moloney, an actress, member of *Cumann na mBan* and later Trade Unionist:

. . . I'm afraid this business has brought the Abbey much nearer disaster than even the European War, as, of course, it is impossible to open while Martial Law prevails . . . I am sure you must have felt very anxious about the Abbey players . . . Mr. Nally, the author of *The Spancel of Death*, is stated to have seen [Sean] Connolly's dead body, and I am afraid the reports of his death are true. Miss Moloney was also implicated in the Rising . . . A boy called Arthur Shields has also been arrested. (Hogan and Burnham, pp. 21–22)²⁵

The non-production of *The Spancel of Death* is an example of the archival "otherness" where alternate memories, and to paraphrase the title of Schneider's book, are "the remains of performing" and remnants of an alternate history. By expanding the presence of the archive, in this case through the digitized record of the Abbey Theatre Archive, it can show even what was never staged, a powerful tool when working against the grain of archival amnesia and non-presence of performance documentation.

Within the Druid Theatre archive is a similar example of where changed programming of productions, but still documented and present within historical evidence, provides alternate performance histories, a ghostly and "spectral otherness," as outlined by Chris Morash at a symposium at NUI Galway discussing the theatrical memory and presence of the victims of the Irish famine of the 1840s, with reference to *The Dreaming of the Bones* by W. B. Yeats.²⁶ This "spectral presence" relates to theatre and performance that never happened, but yet still

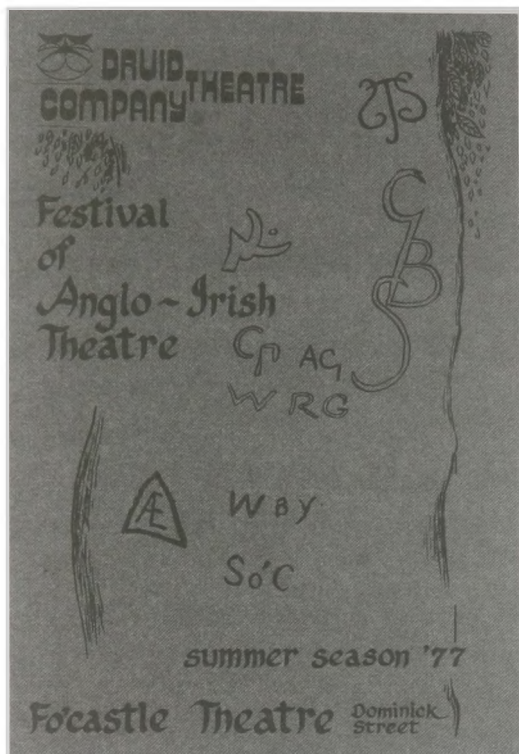


Figure 4. Front cover and inside page of playbill and details of "covering the history" of *The Dreaming of the Bones*.²⁷

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exists and is visible in the archive. This adds a further dimension to the concept of “unifying the fragments” of the performance archive.

In discussing the performance history of Yeats’ *The Dreaming of the Bones*, an anomaly arises as the planned Druid production of the advertised production was dropped from their summer season of 1977, a “Festival of Anglo-Irish Theatre.” The season contained productions of *There are Tragedies and Tragedies* by George Fitzmaurice and *The Playboy of the Western World* by J. M. Synge. In the playbill, the space for noting *The Dreaming of the Bones* is pasted over with a sticker denoting an EXTENDED run of *Playboy*. This is the case in all surviving playbills. By an act of literally “pasting over history,” the altered archival record shows no sign of a Druid production of this Yeats play. It is worth noting that this hidden history would have remained hidden if viewed only in the digital realm. It was only through examining the physical page under a light source that revealed information laying under the layers of the pages.

Conclusions—The Inclusive Archival Future

The counterargument against the contemporary form of the performance archive was resoundingly led by Richard Schechner of New York University, one of the founders of the discipline of Performance Studies. In his article, “Quo Vadis: Performance History?,” Schechner questions the place of the performance archive as a barrier to original work and original drama being produced, in what he calls “the archive problem:”

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, first photography, then film and video, and now digital memory has profoundly affected performance historiography. Before the advent of photography, performance forensics consisted of the analysis of written texts, architectural survivals and ruins, and the visual arts. From plays, letters, eyewitness accounts, archaeological evidence, and so on, scholars were able to form both a physical and a conceptual sense of a past time and its events . . . (Schechner, p. 273)²⁸

He continues to acknowledge documentation of modern theatre practices in varying formats and styles, and asserts where this is leading the integration of archival material into teaching and research:

There was a lot of room for speculation and creative thought. The interplay between the past and the present was extremely active because so much of the past, in terms of hard evidence, was so partial. But with the advent of increasingly detailed first-hand archiving—I mean film, video, and digital memory—the whole archival enterprise has changed. Instead of too little, there is too much. Instead of an open net, there is now the record of the event itself. And the weight of these archived performances and other documents are only increasing over time. (Schechner, pp. 273–274)²⁸

Joseph Roach quite drastically asserts in his article, “The History of the Future” (2004), that “The future of our field is obsolete” (Roach, p. 275)²⁹ Given the interventions necessary in approaching, preserving, understanding, applying, and teaching the archive of performance in the 21st century, Schechner’s and Roach’s points are best not taken at face-value as dismissing the place of performance archives, but rather as a cautionary note on their continuing presence. What Schechner outlines as “a problem of who can teach ‘it’ (being the performance archive) in its mass, scale, variances in format, and with related challenges in access and dissemination, the solution to this question is found in the “it” itself,” the archive is its own best teacher. As the archive is born in one context and time and consumed in another, all interventions made in its preservation prove to be temporary measures as the struggle and challenge for a totality of memory and stabilization of formats sees the archive and archivist running only to stand still in keeping up with itself, in an act of reclamation and in taking back the stage.

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