

## ERIN LEE MA, MS, RMARA

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### PROFILE

#### Project title

Active Archiving at the National Theatre: creating a collection from embedded practice with X production.

#### Supervisors

Dr Kate Elswit and Professor Maria Delgado

#### Profile

I am a qualified archivist, heading up the National Theatre's Archive, chairing the [Association of Performing Arts Collections](#) and a member of BAFTA's Heritage Committee. I am interested in how performing arts venues manage their heritage, what role an archive can have within such a venue and how this history can be accessible to a variety of stakeholders. Coming from a background in archival science, my research at Central is helping me to explore the tensions between archival science and performance studies and better appreciate the work happening at the theatre I am based within.

#### Abstract

As an in-house theatre archivist for the National Theatre (NT) for the past eight years, I have discovered that there is a lack of tailored archival theory for archivists in performing arts institutions; and at the same time archival science fails to take into account the practicalities and nuances of being based in a live, working theatre. This thesis explores how an in-house theatre archive can be more representative<sup>1</sup> of the theatre-making processes and make them available as an educational resource to researchers. Grounded in the fields of both archival science and performance studies, the research investigates alternative methods for capturing the 'development period' of a production in a theatre that has an in-house archive. The interdisciplinary research is supported by surveys of the collections at the NT and other in-house theatre archives and an embedded archiving practice that is underpinned by focus groups of the NT Archive audiences. During the embedded practice, I explore three challenges to archiving this development period and experiment with theories from archival science and performance studies to investigate what alternative methods there are to capture this period. In addition, the findings will suggest methods for making the archive a more thorough and relevant education resource for the NT Archive audiences. By bringing together theories from archival science and performance studies, I will argue that it is possible to create a new method of archiving at the NT, which will have wider applicability across the performing arts and archive sectors.

### **Conference Presentations / Papers**

- 2019 'The Position of the Archive,' APAC Study Day, Stratford-Upon-Avon.
- 2019 'Documenting Performance Process: An Archivist's Perspective,' APAC AGM, London.
- 2018 'Who should save the soap bubbles of performance?,' Archives and Records Association, Glasgow.
- 2018 'The Triangle of Communication: Practitioner, Archives and Academic,' SIBMAS, Paris.
- 2018 'Remains and Precursors - how to exhibit a process,' TaPRA Scenography Working Group, London.
- 2017 'Should Theatre Disappear Like Soap Bubbles?,' DocPerform2, London.
- 2017 'In Context: How do we Remember?,' National Theatre, London.
- 2017 'The National Theatre Archive and Digital Reach,' ARA London Region, London.
- 2015 'Archiving the Arts,' Institute of Historical Research, London.

### **Publications**

- 2020 ARC Magazine Special Issue: Association of Performing Arts Collections, co-editor, Issue 320.
- 2020 'From transaction to collaboration: redefining the academic-archivist relationship in business collections.' (co-authored with Alix Green), Archives and Records 41, no. 1: 32-51.
- 2020 'REVIEW: Ireland's theatre archive: theory, practice, performance: edited by Barry Houlihan, Oxford, Peter Lang Ltd', Archives and Records 41, no. 1: 88-90.
- 2018 'Should Theatre Disappear Like Soap Bubbles?,' Document Academy.
- 2017 'Think Piece: The Archivist of the Future.' [Archives Unlocked: Releasing the Potential](#), p.16.
- 2017 'Lyttelton Lounge: Re-Staging the NT Archive' (co-authored with Natasha Bonnelame and Judith Merritt). Performing Arts Resources, vol.33, p.88-101.
- 2016 'Inside the National Theatre of Great Britain's Archive.' [Newsletter of the SAA Performing Arts Roundtable](#), Winter, p.10-13.