Digging in Your Own Backyard: Archives in the Music History Classroom

James O'Leary, Oberlin College and Conservatory

Danielle Ward-Griffin, Christopher Newport University

Few would dispute that archives are necessary for the professional researcher. After all, even as libraries digitize greater portions of their holdings with increasing precision, there still exists a world of material unavailable to the scholar who does not visit the repository in person. Even aside from practical issues of access, the emergence of "book studies" or "material studies" have placed archival objects at the center of many methodological and theoretical considerations. Scholars in these fields have advocated a "materialist turn" (a response to the so-called "linguistic turn" of the mid-twentieth century), which deemphasizes interpretations of textual "content" *per se* without acknowledging how this content has been mediated by an object, in which, on which, through which, and by which a text becomes available to its receiver.[1] The claim is that this material, too, requires consideration. While the specific debates about the benefits and limitations of these approaches are too broad to engage with in this article, suffice it to say that the issues raised around them are often central to the ways we plan, conceive of, and carry out research.

Given that archival materials are central to graduate and professional work, it may seem obvious that they would be just as valuable in the undergraduate classroom. And yet how exactly? In North American undergraduate courses, where time is short and experience is limited, it may seem indulgent to incorporate obscure material that is unavailable outside of archives. Put roughly, if

---

[1] A complete review of this complex literature lies beyond the scope of this article. For a general overview, see Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Kuechler-Fogden, Mike Rowlands, Patricia Spyer, eds. *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2013). For a critique of the idea of the "material turn" (with an emphasis on Actor-Network Theory) see Dan Hicks, Marcy C. Beaudry, *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially the introduction. For studies in how these ideas can be applied to the classroom, see Eleanor Mitchell, Peggy Seiden, Suzy Taraba, eds., *Past or Portal? Enhancing Undergraduate Learning through Special Collections and Archives* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2012).

Journal of Music History Pedagogy, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 1–18. ISSN 2155-1099X (online)
© 2017, *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, licensed under CC BY 3.0
(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

undergraduate students are learning basic historical narratives, should they focus primarily on so-called "major players" rather than devote their time to the local or the obscure? While we recognize this as a valid concern, we nonetheless contend that archival work can enrich the undergraduate classroom. Working through archives can make explicit for students the ways in which disparate materials are assembled into the historical narratives that form the bedrock of their course reading. Moreover, working with archives can be ideal for helping to develop skills central to humanistic thought: learning how to ask critical questions, how to pose imaginative answers to those questions, and how to test those answers rigorously against the available evidence.

Of course, there are a number of other potential challenges to working in archives that, as teachers, we cannot afford to ignore. Archival objects are fragile, expensive, and they require extra resources: curators and archivists to maintain them, librarians to supervise the object's viewing, special spaces and viewing areas for researchers, materials to preserve and restore them, and so on. However, if music history professors are fortunate enough to have local archives at their disposal, some of these challenges can be turned into opportunities that allow students to become acquainted with the sites and practices of hands-on research. In addition, as major libraries make their archival holdings increasingly available online, students can interrogate their course materials using images from across the country, thus getting a taste of far-ranging research without leaving campus.

The goal of this paper is to suggest some of the potential benefits of including archives in class at the undergraduate level. Our strategies are necessarily rooted in our own experiences of teaching music majors in a liberal arts college and conservatory environment. At Oberlin College and Conservatory, O'Leary incorporates objects from the Frederick R. Selch Collection into many of his classes. This repository, donated to Oberlin by Patricia Selch in memory of her husband, contains more than 700 instruments (with a particular strength in colonial and early American string instruments), over 9,000 rare books and scores (including first and early editions of treatises by Gaffurius, Mersenne, and Zarlino, as well as first editions of Billings, Lyons, and other American tune books), dozens of artworks, and thousands of pieces of ephemera (ranging from British and American theater, to brass-band memorabilia, to newspaper clippings). At Christopher Newport University, Ward-Griffin has access to the Josephine L. Hughes Collection, consisting of over 5,000 pieces of individual sheet music and numerous books dating from 1797 to the 1940s, with over sixty percent of the music dating from before the Civil War.

Our experiences differ from each other's, as do our ideas about how to use objects in the classroom. We also recognize at the outset that our discussion is neither exhaustive nor definitive. Much of what we have done in the classroom with archives has been fortuitous: we are simply lucky to have the materials at hand. Moreover, our classes are small, numbering 20 or fewer students, allowing for more individualized approaches; not all the strategies advocated here will be applicable to large lecture classes and, even those that do work, may need adjustment. Still, despite the obvious differences in our situations and the great variation in teaching music history across North American schools, there are certain goals that transcend our individual experiences. We feel that some of the ideas we share here can be adapted to classrooms with limited access to collections of archival material. Such strategies can be used for local histories, ethnographies, depositories, and even for personal or family items that the students may themselves hold. In what follows, we will first introduce some broad considerations about what archival material can offer that secondary sources cannot. Then, we will turn to some of the more concrete uses to which we ourselves have put archives in the undergraduate classroom.

I. Why archives?

Why would archives be any better than facsimiles, textbooks, and modern editions in the undergraduate classroom? To begin to answer these questions, we must first describe how archival materials may differ from other classroom materials, a difference that can be summarized as the distinction between a "text" and a "book" (and by extension, between "music" and its score). Roughly speaking (and holding at bay for now the familiar ontological debates about texts and scores), the text is the intellectual "content" of a book. It can exist abstracted out of time. A book, however, contains text, but it also contains something extra. This "something extra" will be altered when a book is damaged, even if the text does not change. Books, scores, ephemera, and other objects exist in time and space, and therefore carry an irreducible past. This is simply to say that they have been used, and that past use is part of the object.

In his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin calls this "something extra" an aura, and worries that mechanical reproduction "emancipates the work of art from parasitical dependence on ritual" by reproducing the text independently from the object.[2] We highlight two kinds of rituals here. The first is past rituals, evidence of which often accrues to the object over time. Annotations, dog ears, worn pages, and other marks remind us that the texts contained within the books have always already been mediated by a material, a user, and a set of customs and norms that have dictated how the book was to have been used. (This is not to assume that the book has in fact been used accordingly or, one might say, dutifully.) Yet there is another, different kind of ritual, one that unfolds in the present day. The donning of white gloves, the highly observed entrance into the hushed archival space, the triangles of foam, the weights, the magnifying glasses, the special pencils and other accouterments of archival studies make working with these objects special, marking a period of time that exists somehow apart from the everyday, a period in which the individual becomes aware of time in a different way than he or she experiences it in mundane life. When these objects are moved beyond the archival space, into exhibitions, displays, or performance contexts, they also take on new rituals that encourage a contemplative, even reverential kind of behavior.

---

[2] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, 1968), pp. 217-51, here 224.

Can these properties and these rituals be mobilized productively in the classroom to create a kind of knowledge that texts alone cannot give? In the sections that follow, we suggest ways in which we've mobilized them toward pedagogical ends.

II. Microhistory

Many archives (especially local archives) contain historical oddities—objects that will likely never be anthologized or digitized because, crudely speaking, they are not "significant" enough to warrant the expense. And yet it would be difficult to deny that these more obscure holdings can offer a wealth of historical information that is hard to discern in secondary sources. They can reveal traditionally marginalized voices or grant access to points of view that do not always survive in written form. To put it bluntly, rather than being presented with "facts," as one might assume in a textbook, students working with unfamiliar objects are inundated with questions. Learning to manage such questions productively—to shape, to home, to hone them—is an essential lesson in historical research.

A strategy for helping students address the questions they pose to an object is to have them maneuver between broader, pre-existing historical narratives on the one hand, and local, particular questions about the individual object on the other, trying to devise a plausible history of the object by noting how it meets expectations set up by past scholarly work, and (especially) how it may not. This, roughly speaking, is the method of inquiry proposed by a group of scholars who refer to themselves as microhistorians (including Robert Darnton, Carlo Ginzburg, Jonathan Spence, and Jill Lepore), and who have typically used such objects to link the local with the broad, the obscure with the mainstream. They usually take a sociological approach to history, building a "thick" context in order to explain the significance of things that may seem utterly foreign to onlookers.[3] To paraphrase Giovanni Levi, the simple act of buying a loaf of bread actually encompasses the wider system of the whole world's grain markets.[4]

It was with this "double vision"—relating the micro and the macro, the obscure and the prominent—that we attempted to approach our archival work with undergraduates. In one upper-level course about early nineteenth-century American music at Oberlin Conservatory, for example, students chose a single instrument from the school's Frederic R. Selch Collection. Students were to spend the next twelve weeks using this object to pry open a thick, localized cultural context, the kind that typically may remain outside the scope of wide-sweeping historical surveys. This project required students to interrogate what they read in secondary literature from class using primary sources from archives: instruments, treatises, historical books, and other ephemera. It was to serve as an introduction, not only to archival research, but also to formulating a strong research agenda and asking compelling historical questions.

One student came into the first meeting having chosen a clarinet that to an untrained eye seemed, frankly, unremarkable. The collection contained ornate and unusual instruments, but this one was dusty, cracked, and studded with dozens of small, unseemly nails. Could this awkward object sustain an entire semester of investigation? But this student's work exceeded all expectations. Her sharp eye immediately homed in on details that made this dull object seem suddenly mysterious: a thumb key that was never added, a slightly odd shape. She noticed an inherent contradiction in the object: on the one hand this object was odd and marred by tacks, but on the other hand the clarinet was at one time a luxury good, lined with ebony and ringed with ivory. Why did it look like this? Who made it? What happened to it?

As she began to interrogate this instrument, she embarked on a journey that lasted for the rest of the term. To address her research questions, she compared her clarinet to other clarinets in the Selch collection, noting subtle similarities between models whose provenance was already known. Armed with these observations, she dove into the vast secondary writing on the history of the clarinet to see how scholars have characterized these same features, toggling back and forth between the physical object and the scholarly literature in order to zero in on a potential date and manufacturer for this clarinet. But she did not stop at the physical details. She then brought the object to the attention of a local instrument restorer who suggested to her that the nails were the sign of meticulous repair. The question then became, why would anybody want to spend so much energy to repair this instrument? What made this instrument so special? This led her to open her inquiry into the broader social context that surrounded this instrument. By the end of the course she produced a paper and an exhibition, which interlaced details about the physical object with descriptions of the instrument industry of early nineteenth-century New England, the typical instrumental ensembles of the same period, and broader discussions of how instruments were marketed to various classes of people at the time. Her work became a multi-layered tale that superimposed thick cultural context upon positivistic inquiry, revealing a vast world of instrument construction, advertising, and use—all starting with a single clarinet.

---

[3] For a brief history of the term, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory, Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry*, 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 10 - 35. See also Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001): 129 – 144.

[4] Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing,* ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 96.

In a certain sense, this student reached no conclusion: her ideas about where this instrument may have come from cannot be fully corroborated. But the very fact that this object was "unknowable" proved to be in itself an advantage, for in devising plausible explanations about what this could have been, where it came from, how it was used, and how it compared to other instruments, this student was required to cull from a wide variety of sources to make a compelling story about it. Skills like database searching, evaluating sources, and verifying evidence naturally became part of this project. In the end, she realized that she was not writing the capital-H history of this instrument, but rather putting forth a plausible, historical argument, drawing upon the best evidence she could find.

In a similar manner, Ward-Griffin brought students into the Josephine L. Hughes Collection for an upper-level seminar. She instructed students to choose one or two pieces of sheet music from the full inventory list and to write a "backstory" that both historically contextualized it and used the object as a jumping off point for telling a broader history of American music.[5] What appealed to her about this concept was how such a limited focus could spawn such wide-ranging narratives. Students visited the archive, scheduled individual follow-up appointments with the special-collections librarian, Amy Boykin, and were given scanned copies of their scores to bring home. (Because of copyright restrictions, she scanned only scores that were in the public domain and that were dated from before 1923.) They were also encouraged to compare their scores with other versions of the same piece through the Sheet Music Consortium, an online catalog that provides information and some images of sheet music collections from libraries across the United States. In this way, students could connect their projects to the wider dissemination of sheet music in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

---

[5] This backstory project was inspired by National Public Radio's program "BackStory with the American History Guys." Featuring three U.S. history professors, this national radio program tells elaborate backstories of subjects in the newspaper headlines, focusing on practices such as shopping during Black Friday, or the past use of contemporary objects, such as tools of the trade.

Beyond the excitement of gaining special access to the hidden recesses of the library, this project invited students to undertake detective work on their pieces. Rather than beginning with a set narrative into which they would come to situate the piece, the students used their observations to generate a list of questions. The foci of these questions ran the gamut from lithography to dedications. Some of them were quickly revealed to be dead ends, but most offered a jumping off point for further research. The production of questions was also key to thinking about history more broadly. Since the people who composed many of these pieces were either forgotten or unknown, students were challenged to find other ways to situate the score in their conception of American music life. In order to help them do so, students read recent musicological studies that advocated different approaches to thinking about research. In class students led discussions about how they might write alternate music histories and wrote reflections on how the listener, the performer, the impresario, and the businessman may each occupy different perspectives in their telling of history. The blended approach to the seminar—combining "newer" perspectives on music with "older" unfamiliar objects—was once again meant to push students to think beyond well-worn narratives about progress and composer biography.

While it may be daunting or risky for a professor to focus on "unknown" objects in class, we have found that allowing students to lead the exploratory process can produce excellent results. Perhaps the most successful of the backstory assignments was entitled "Stealing Georgian Opera." In examining one printed version of the aria, "Ah! What is the Bosom's Commotion" by Michael Kelly, the student noticed slight discrepancies in the notation that stood out in the context of the rest of the piece and were not found in the other copies of the score, either in the Hughes Collection or through the Sheet Music Consortium. Reviewing the secondary literature on music printing of this time, the student learned that such "typos" were commonly placed into pirated copies of music and, what is more, that these bootleg copies of music frequently circulated in the U.S. After undertaking extensive research into the history and location of printing houses in the United Kingdom and realizing that the printing house listed on this version of the score was never in existence, he suggested that this piece of sheet music was most likely a pirated copy. The student presented his work at the campus's annual undergraduate research conference, published it in the college's journal and was honored with an award that recognized it as an outstanding contribution to undergraduate research at the university that year. This kind of modest enquiry—blending one's own observations with support from secondary literature—is exactly the sort of contribution that students may be able to make as undergraduate researchers. Like O'Leary's example of the clarinet—and indeed, like much musicological work—the history may not be definitive. But it is intriguing, and, most importantly, deeply engaged in creating knowledge.

The "backstory" assignment, then, required students to realize that there is no one path to take, but that research is itself a process of deciphering, of separating the wheat from the chaff. By focusing on a single primary source object, students learn how to undertake scholarly investigation, in all of its circuitousness and difficulty. Although students may enter into an archive determined to find *the* definitive story, the missing pieces and many versions of the same piece force them to entertain the idea that there is no single history to be uncovered. In one class discussion, a student tellingly remarked that she had not known that there were so many different ways to *think* about music. In spite of her thorough training in the performing styles for different composers and pieces, she had previously been trained to approach all music with the same focus on composer intention in mind. Bringing students into the archive, then, is an invaluable way to cultivate ownership not only of history, but of making meaning out of music in general. Students develop their own expertise and learn to trust their own ideas as much as those in the secondary literature; in short, they become researchers.

III. Narration and Authority

In both of our previous examples, students used a single object to "test" existing historical narratives, and then to offer alternative interpretations of the historical record based on their analysis of empirical data. Part of our goal in these cases was to introduce students to some of the complexities surrounding the construction of narratives. Certainly archives can be central to this endeavor, but, as professional historians know very well, archives can also complicate this task. Anita Helle, for example, has noted that the ways in which archives order objects can also impose a way of seeing, in that the techniques we have for storing, retrieving, and accessing these objects can "reconfigure the hierarchical field of what is to be valued."[6] Similarly, cultural theorist Mieke Bal has argued that, just as there are many kinds of things to be collected, there are many narratives produced by the reordering of objects within a collection.[7] As students are forced to make sense of these objects and their contexts, can we simultaneously make them aware of the methodological difficulties of creating historical narratives?

---

6. Anita Helle, ed., *The Unraveling Archive: Essays on Sylvia Plath* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 3.

7. Mieke Bal, "Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting,* ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 111-112.

To address such issues, Ward-Griffin once again joined forces with librarian Boykin in the sheet music collection at Christopher Newport. Working with sheet music offers special problems that other kinds of materials do not. For example, the power of the archive is often thought to be located in the singularity of its materials or in the unique story or narrative that an object is thought to embody. However, while recognizing that every individual piece of sheet music is a unique object, the ubiquity of similar objects is one of the most salient features of these pieces—they were, after all, pop songs or mass media. A complete understanding of what they are must account for both their individuality and their multiplicity. Rather than being concerned with the rarity of a particular archival object, it may be more useful to focus on how the archival objects demonstrate the material processes that regulate or effect performance.

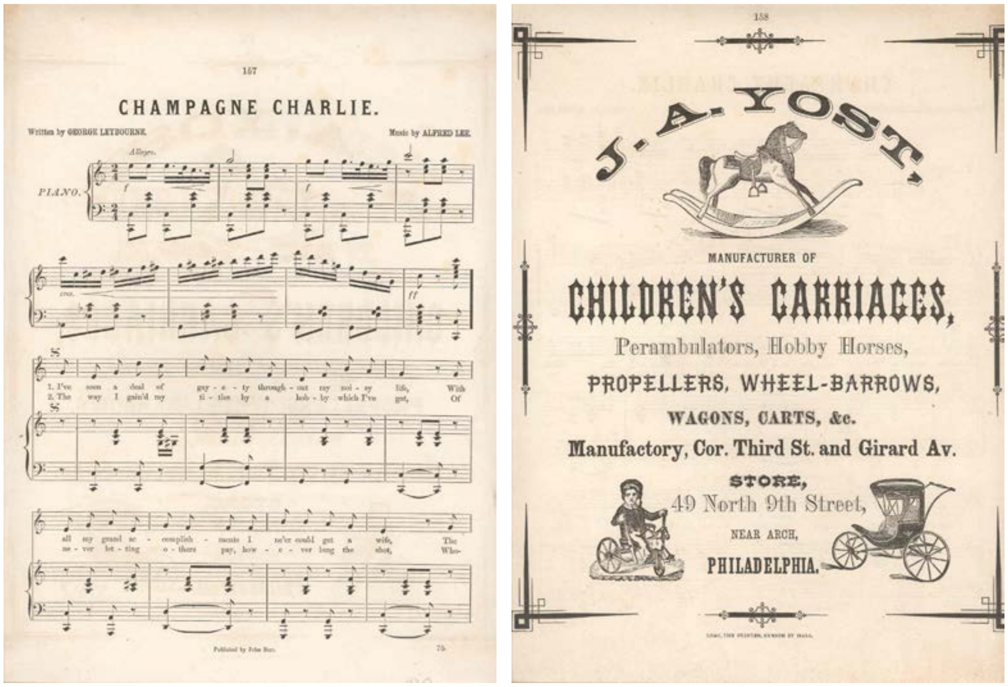
For a survey class, Ward-Griffin pre-selected a dozen pieces, all of which were available in different editions, transcriptions, and publications. She and Boykin then spread this music out for students to view, keeping different versions of the same piece together to invite comparison but disregarding questions of style or chronological order. What students encountered as they entered the room was very different from their previous academic experiences in a music history classroom. Rather than confronting these pieces as singular, anthologized texts, students encountered them as objects that presented music in a state of flux. The multiplicity of versions suggested a complex history of dissemination, a welter of performance styles, and a variety of implications for instrumentation and realization.

In the first part of the class, students moved from one piece of music to the next, reading the inscriptions, the places of publication, and humming or "air playing" the melody lines. Students then clustered around one or more pieces and were asked to speak about what they saw. Usually, the first thing they noted was the imagery, particularly the detailed cover art. For instance, students compared different covers of "The Old Armchair" and discussed what the domestic imagery may tell us of the likely place of performance and ballad style of this piece. Students also examined advertising tunes, such as "Dr. Tichnor's Antiseptic March," and paid attention to the advertisements alongside which music was published, such as the sheet music for one version of "Champagne Charlie," which rather incongruously includes an advertisement for baby carriages on the verso (**Figure 1**).[8] Frequently, students forged productive connections with their peers, who were looking at different pieces across the classroom, noting similarities in themes, publication details, or imagery. It was an exercise in narrative building: students created their own order and conceptual apparatus to link the various objects around the room.

---

[8] Henry Russell, *The Old Arm Chair* (1840); Louis Blake, arr., *Dr. Tichenor's Antiseptic March* (New Orleans, LA: Sherrouse Medicine Company Ltd., 1895); Alfred Lee, *Champagne Charlie* (Jules Berr, n.d.). For more on the place of Champagne Charlie in American musical culture, see Gillian M. Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

Figure 1: Alfred Lee and George Leybourne, "Champagne Charlie," (Jules Berr, n.d.). Image courtesy of the Josephine L. Hughes Collection, Christopher Newport University.


167
CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE.
Written by GEORGE LEYBOURNE.
Music by ALFRED LEE.
Allegro.
PIANO.
1. I've seen a deal of gay-e-ty through-out my noi-sy life, With
2. The way I gain'd my ti-tles by a hob-by which I've got, Of
all my grand ac-complish-ments I ne'er could get a wife, The
ne-ver let-ting o-thers pay, how-e-ver long the shot, Who-
Published by Jules Berr.
158

J. A. YOST,

MANUFACTURER OF

CHILDREN'S CARRIAGES,

Perambulators, Hobby Horses,

PROPELLERS, WHEEL-BARROWS,

WAGONS, CARTS, &c.

Manufactory, Cor. Third St. and Girard Av.

STORE,

49 North 9th Street,

NEAR ARCH,

PHILADELPHIA.

Using multiple objects with ostensibly the same score accomplished two goals. First, the variation between the objects "destabilized" the very idea of an authoritative text. When students were presented with multiplicity, they were forced to localize their arguments, to limit any grand notions of what a text "means" or "is," and instead focus on what a text "has meant" or "was in a particular context."[9] Second, in terms of historiography, the end result was to shift students' focus from a composer-centric to a consumption-oriented history of American musical life.[10] The ubiquity of this music led into a discussion of the circulation of printed music in the nineteenth century and the interplay between music making and commerce in America.

---

[9] This echoes Richard Taruskin, "The Musical Mystique: Defending Classical Music Against its Devotees," in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 330–53.

[10] This was also the historiographical suggestion Richard Crawford posed in *America's Musical Landscape: The Business of Music from Billings to Gershwin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Much like the history of American music, the archive offered up a jumbled selection of pieces that could be interpreted in multiple ways. By having students serve as the interpreters, they learned to develop the very narrative skills needed to bring these objects—and music history—to life. Offering students access to the scattered and "unprocessed" contents of archives, then, can make them aware of the construction of history in a way that no textbook can, even despite our best efforts to problematize narratives. In part, this is because students must learn to deal productively with an over-abundance of material, with a plethora of rich, tantalizing detail that, at some point, may have to be siphoned off in order to create a historical argument. This process, moving from observations, to vague hunches, to preliminary conclusions, engages students in the very "making" of music history.

IV. Historical Imagination

We have found that abstract issues of historiographical method can be confusing to undergraduates, who often lack experience with different varieties of historical narrative that would explain how different methodological theories can take a more concrete form. Lost in abstraction, our students have occasionally expressed frustration—some have said, rather bluntly, that they would like to focus more on music and less on theory. We sympathize. However, on a general level we have found some strategies for incorporating these theoretical issues into undergraduate courses in concrete ways. We believe that integrating the study of archival objects into our courses can offer students a glimpse "under the hood," so to speak, presenting them with the raw, often chaotic materials that eventually become fashioned into the coherent narratives they find in their texts. By drawing on their previous historical experience, their deductive powers, and their instincts as musicians, we encourage them to think through historical data to create historical arguments.

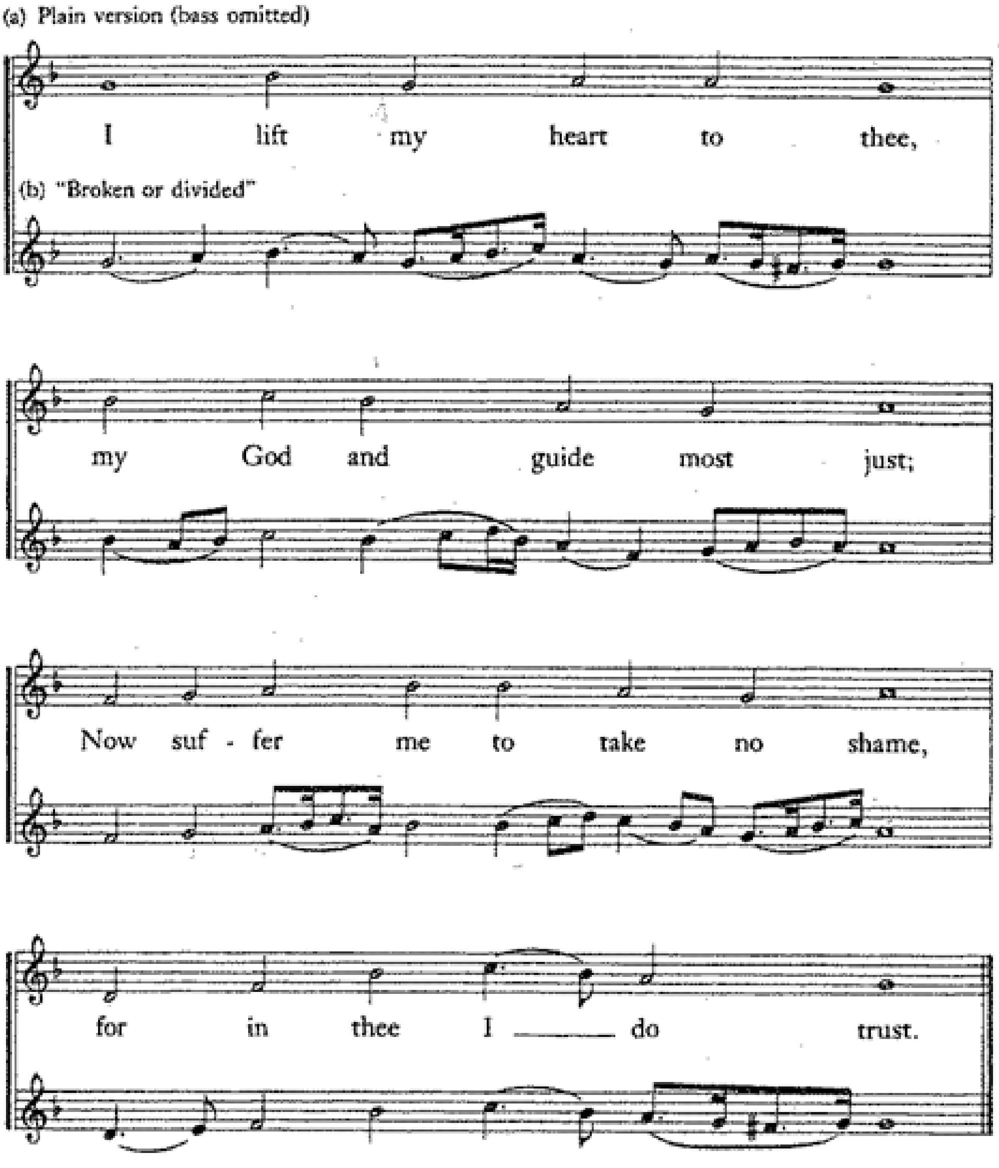
Rather than focus on epistemology or ontology directly, we have asked students to consider other questions that arrive at similar considerations indirectly. For example, one question we have explored with students is, what could count as historical evidence? In a large music history survey, O'Leary used archival materials in an attempt to unveil the process by which histories are assembled. The subject was the dispute that raged in the colonies in various forms from the 1640s to the 1720s between what Americanists call "Old-Style" (or "Usual-Way") singing on the one hand, and "Regular Singing" on the other. As background, O'Leary pointed out to students that there was there was a contradiction at the heart of Puritanical worship. On the one hand, Puritans felt psalms were most properly sung during worship, and they acknowledged a long interpretive tradition that relied on Biblical evidence to prove this. On the other hand, central to Puritanical belief was also the concept of "total depravity," and they felt that any music accompanying a Biblical text would be just as sinful as that music's composer.[11] O'Leary then discussed how Puritans attempted to work through this contradiction with their books, how they tried to strip down what they thought had become extravagances in Roman Catholic and Anglican worship by eliminating all parts of the service for which there was no evidence in scripture: no choirs, no instruments, and no "composed" music. Instead, Puritans sang monophonic psalm tunes, and followed a tradition of "lining out" by which one member of the congregation would sing the psalm line by line, and the congregation would imitate. In the early eighteenth century, however, a group of reformers noted that even in this stripped-down oral tradition, the singing of psalm tunes had corroded beyond recognition, and from church to church the once-familiar tunes accumulated their own idiosyncrasies. For them, deviation from scripture-sanctioned music was a sign of laxity in practice, which was akin to decadence and immorality. The next generation of reformers sought to address the issue of incorrect singing by promoting what they called Regular Singing: the establishment of singing schools and singing from sheet music in order to fix the psalm tradition and ensure it was being performed as "correctly" as possible. Yet even though—for moral and musical reasons—Regular Singing appeared to supersede the Old Style, evidence shows some resistance to singing in the Regular Style and that the Old Style continued to hang on long after the establishment of singing schools.

The question is why. It is at this point where O'Leary brought out examples from the Selch Collection archives to try to ascertain a couple of specific questions about Puritan worship: How did they learn songs? How did they choose which songs to sing? How did congregations respond to the person who was lining out? In the Selch Collection, there are early editions of the two main Psalters the settlers brought with them from Europe (called the Ainsworth Psalter and the Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter), as well as a facsimile of the Puritans' own *Bay Psalm Book*. Using a document camera, O'Leary asked the students to think how these books would have been used in connection with the services. Immediately students noticed just how little music there is in each of the books—and in the case of the *Bay Psalm Book*, there is no music at all until the ninth edition. O'Leary asked them to speculate why this might be the case, and usually the answer comes readily: that Puritans would already have known the tunes. As a class, then, O'Leary asked them to stand and try to approximate what singing in a Puritan service may have been like. During the course of their singing, O'Leary approximated the original tune, but did not sing it exactly as it is printed, and when he showed them the music, students noticed immediately that the congregation had sung the song incorrectly—that their practice had "drifted" away from the text (**Figure 2**).

---

[11] This has been elucidated frequently in the literature, but most recently by Glenda Goodman, "'The Tears I Shed at the Songs of Thy Church': Seventeenth-Century Musical Piety in the English Atlantic World," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 65, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 691-725.

Figure 2: Two versions of "Southwell tune" from *A New and Easie Method* (1686) set to Psalm 25, cited in Nicholas Temperley, "The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 3 (Autumn, 1981), 526.


(a) Plain version (bass omitted)
I lift my heart to thee,
(b) "Broken or divided"
my God and guide most just;
Now suf - fer me to take no shame,
for in thee I ——— do trust.

What, O'Leary asked, was the difference between the two styles? Which did they like better? For some students, Regular Singing was preferable: they felt more secure, the sound was more "correct." Others, however, felt that they could be more enthusiastic about their singing with improvisation, that they could put a personal stamp on it, even amid the crowd of other students, and that the Old Style was more expressive of their devotion; it was more fun.

O'Leary concluded with a historiographical question. Security, fun, enthusiasm, joy—are these present-day experiences a kind of historical evidence? Students tended to answer, No, of course not; "joy" is not a kind of knowledge, but rather a "feeling." Moreover, our present day feelings are somehow "ours," not "theirs" in the past, and that we could only attribute this "joy" to people of the past through a sheer act of imagination. But O'Leary asked the students to reconsider. He told students that the historian's job is to explain anomalies and fill gaps in our historical record, and that this all starts with an act of what R. G. Collingwood (and later Leo Treitler) called the "historical imagination."[12] O'Leary told them that none of what we did in class was really accurate (nobody really knows what the Puritans sounded like). But he suggested that creating a dialogue between hermeneutic interpretation and historical data allowed us to "reanimate" how people may have felt about a particular practice by translating it into our own analogous terms. In doing so they created a historical argument (one that will need further testing, of course, to be convincing). While our imagination can create a historical argument, our evidence must refute it.

Yet, even if there exist creative ways to use archives to introduce problems of historiography at the introductory level, what would be the purpose of doing so? While we acknowledge that dispensing with historical narrative would be impossible, we believe that presenting prefab historical narratives to students can lead to a danger—that ultimately we as faculty may end up doing some of the tough thinking for our students, setting up paradigms or "lenses" through which students come to view all evidence. We have found that it can then be difficult for students to let go of these paradigms in the upper levels of study. Our goals in bringing "incomplete" or "unfinished" narratives to students at the introductory level is to develop their intellectual flexibility, and to encourage them to be critical not only of narratives, but of narrating.

This becomes especially apparent when undergraduates begin to write research papers. While a great deal of pedagogical research has dealt with ways that students may become more invested and involved in the learning process, such as through flipped courses, when it comes to individual research, it can be difficult to translate the student-centered classroom into student-centered research.[13] In our experience, students tend to rely on secondary sources for their work because they are more practical and offer a ready-made argument against which they can push back. By no means is this negative (far from it), but ultimately students may have few opportunities to learn how to access and evaluate primary sources for themselves. They may not consider how they, too, can interact with primary sources just as the scholars they cite do—or, put differently, how they can shift from consumers to producers of knowledge. While we acknowledge that this goal could be achieved without archives, we maintain that using an object whose past is unknown by necessity emboldened students to begin with their own observations.

---

[12] Leo Treitler, *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Ward-Griffin witnessed this process in one of her classes, when a voice student examined an obscure opera aria and quickly observed a number of similarities in range and melodic contour between this aria and "Un'aura amorosa" from *Così fan tutte* that he had recently sung. Diving into the secondary literature, he learned that "Un'aura amorosa" had been performed by the composer during this same time period and hypothesized that it may have influenced the composition of this second aria. In this way, the student learned to trust his own instincts as he began to consider the genealogy of possible performances that had led to the composition of the little-known piece. Most importantly, through this act of historical imagination, the student set up his own framework for telling the history of this piece. The archive's capacity for engaging our historical imaginations allowed this student to draw upon expertise that he had gained as a sensitive listener and performer. In this respect, then, archives enable student involvement, not just for the sake of increasing student input, but to produce a richer and more varied historical account.

V. Enthusiasm

So far, much of our attention has been given to reanimating rituals that once surrounded objects in the past. Yet what about the rituals of today that we associate with archival work? What about all the ways that archival work requires us to behave extraordinarily, to become hyperaware of what is in our hands and how we act around it? Indeed, one of the most common responses from students is how enthusiastic they are about the process of an archival class, be it about watching the professor's theatrics as he or she prepares to handle an object, or about their own encounter with something that has been through so many hands and has witnessed so much history. In the book *Past or Portal,* Toni Bowers relates that she once taught a course on Richardson's *Pamela* at the University of Pennsylvania in which each member of the class was given an object to investigate throughout the semester relating to the novel (contemporary reviews, satires, burlesques, diatribes, and so forth). In her essay she transcribes her students' responses. The most common reactions were how "enthusiastic," how "excited," how "awesome," how "cool" the whole endeavor was.[14] Our students' reactions have been similar. But is this "cool factor" pedagogical?

---

[13] In music scholarship, active learning and flipped classrooms have been the focus of studies in *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy (Volumes 1, 2, and 3)*, particularly Kris Shaffer and Bryn Hughes, "Flipping the Classroom: Three Methods" (2013), Trevor de Clercq, "Toward a Flipped Aural Skills Classroom: Harnessing Recording Technology for Performance-Based Homework" (2013), and Amanda L. Scherbenske, "Student-Centered Learning Strategies for Teaching World and Popular Musics" (2015). In music history, recent edited anthologies have advocated for active learning strategies, as seen in James Briscoe, ed., *Vitalizing Music History Teaching* (Pendragon Press, 2010) and James Davis, ed., *The Music History Classroom* (Routledge, 2012), as well as many articles in this *Journal.*

We suggest a few ways to harness this enthusiasm toward pedagogical ends. First, there is an act of defamiliarization—both of the classroom experience and the classroom material—that can in and of itself be a historical lesson. As Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass wrote in their article, "The Materiality of a Shakespearean Text": "When the materiality of the early texts confronts modern practices and theories, it casts those modern practices and theories into doubt, revealing that they, too, possess a specific—and equally contingent—history. It makes us face our own historical situatedness."[15] We believe that the experience of defamiliarization can be key to adopting a critical mindset. We have seen students become newly critical of their own opinions about what is "right" or what is "good" by being wrenched away from their habitual modes of interacting with music.

For example, O'Leary taught a course on the history of musical instruments using objects from the Selch Collection. Each student was initially asked to describe the provenance and history of a particular instrument in the collection, and relate it to a broader overview of that instrument's development. As the semester continued, however, the class became something else entirely. Members of the historical performance department graciously agreed to demonstrate various different historical instruments with students, and then to explain why they would choose one particular instrument over another in a given context. Catherine Meints, who teaches viola da gamba and cello, explained that, for playing Bach, she would choose one particular German baroque cello, while for playing Strauss she would choose another instrument. The reasons were not simply because of some gesture toward historical fidelity—she was not trying to "get it right" (she was, after all, well aware of the debates surrounding performance practice from the 1980s and 1990s). For her, certain instruments offered advantages because of their construction and their timbre. As more historical-performance professors began to talk to the class, the course became a kind of ear training in timbre: what might be the effect of using this particular flute as opposed to that one? Developing a kind of critical ear in this way (not all cellos sound like "cello") is necessary for a conservatory student, and being connoisseurs of timbre can open up new possibilities for score interpretation that may have seemed otherwise straightforward. Beyond that, however, it engaged the students as musicians, linking the development of instruments to present-day artistic choices: that the construction of instruments over time brought out different possibilities of timbre, articulation, and voicing which they, as musicians, could exploit today.

---

[14] Toni Bowers, "Crazy for Pamela in the Rare Books Library: Undergraduates Reflect on Doing Original Research in Special Collections," in *Past or Portal?*, 56-57.

[15] Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, "The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 255–83, here p. 257.

Ward-Griffin witnessed a similar example of defamiliarization in January of 2016, when one of her music history courses hosted a musical concert for the university and local community based on the materials in the archives. Featuring student performers, this evening presented selected pieces from the archive, alongside introductory remarks by the students who had researched the pieces during the previous semester. In one instance, a composition student had realized an incomplete handwritten piece called the "Horticultural Rag." Full of metrical irregularities, an incomplete repeat, and typographical mistakes, this piece only offered a melody line and some nonsensical words. As the student explained to the audience, there was no way of knowing what the composer may have meant and that, confronted with this scarcity of information, he latched onto the "rag" title. Sung by a soprano and accompanied by the piano, the performance drew upon stylistic dimensions—including later effects such as jazz and musical-theatre singing styles—that made sense of the nonsensical parts of the rag and delighted the audience. This realization not only transmitted knowledge of the style, but also updated the piece to help a twenty-first century audience enjoy music for which very little written archival evidence survives. Performance scholar Diana Taylor has suggested that performance itself constitutes a kind of embodied knowledge and that something is lost in the accumulation of documents from a performance (papers, reviews, scores) in an archive. If, as she put it, the collection "succeeds in separating the source of 'knowledge' from the 'knower'" (that is, the performer), then inventive performances of archival objects can reinvest knowledge back into the musicians themselves. In performing this work, then, students adopted the rhetorical maneuvers needed not simply to historicize, but to reframe the archival object for new audiences.

These examples demonstrate how working in archives can draw upon students' experiences, tastes, and joys as musicians and listeners. In both examples, perhaps paradoxically, we have found enthusiasm and doubt to be two sides of the same coin. So much of what we read in pedagogical studies now focuses on student-centered learning. In its more insipid forms, "student-centered" becomes a kind of learning that asks students only to relate what is going on in class to their own past experiences and their own personal passions—in other words, to articulate what about their studies is familiar. Certainly this is a necessary part of any learning process, but we have found that archival work brought students beyond this step, not by engaging them on their terms, but rather through their confusion and their discomfort. In the end, we believe that incorporating archival work in the classroom can achieve the opposite ends of student-centered learning. Engaging students through archival work functions in many ways like a ritual, bringing the students beyond themselves and asking them to encounter something in which time, space, and history work differently than it does for their personal lives. Such an experience, we think, is the first step toward becoming an informed historian and musician.

In a pedagogical world of clickers, blogs and online discussion forums, bringing students into physical archives can seem positively retrograde. It can also seem unforgivably positivist; its focus on objects may easily be conflated with a search for objective data that these things are meant to reveal. But, as we have argued in this article, the goal of such endeavors is to make students aware not only of the materiality of historical objects, but also of the historiographical maneuvers and processes that this material undergoes in the making of history. And archival holdings and objects are uniquely positioned to do so as they prod students to consider the cracks in music history narratives.