

Music theatre preservation: Intersections between musicology and archival science

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Disciplinary background A. Musicology focused on the documentation of music theatre works to facilitate their study and preservation. The traditional methods of musicology are not enough for the preservation of music theatre, as such works are interdisciplinary in themselves involving different artistic expressions such as music, theatre and dance, also including diverse media such as electronic components.

Disciplinary background B. Archival science centered on the description of events involving performance using archival standards. Archiving performative practices as music theatre remains problematic for archives, to accomplish this task, archivists must know these works and understand their collaborations, idiosyncratic language and notation, as well as their performative features.

Abstract

The preservation of music theatre works in archival contexts requires: to examine the in/external relationships and the mutual interactions incorporated into the works in agreement with the context of their creation/production; to provide the means and tools for facilitating the recreation of music theatre works in more historically informed approaches; to focus on relevant theoretical writings analysing the social contexts in which music theatre works were created and study the documentation, gathering, mapping, documenting and safeguarding the collaborative practices, describing interactions, interventions and interpretations of creators, performers and other contributors involved in performances; to broaden discussions about issues relating to the preservation of creations in the field of the performing arts in (digital) archives, in which artists build their own archives.

Music theatre works composed from the 1960s onwards have not yet been subject to careful attention even though their preservation is fundamental to the survival of performative features. Should this performative genre not be appropriately acknowledged, outlined, preserved, and disseminated through digital platforms, there is the risk of it disappearing, not reaching audiences. Nonetheless, archivists unaccustomed to this types of idiosyncratic language and notation, collaborative practices, new forms of being on stage (challenging musicians, dancers and actors) or new ways of communicating with the audience (changing their perception of participation), encounter difficulties in processing these works and producing archival records, therefore it is fundamental to fill this gap. Music theatre works bring together different artistic fields (music, theatre, dance) and are characterized by recourse to a wide variety of sources (music, settings, movement, text, electroacoustics, image, props, costumes, light), all requiring articulation. Moreover, these explore performance opportunities that imply sharing ideas amongst all collaborators (behind the act of creation), documenting their thoughts (decisions made during the collaborative process), besides other issues involved in producing performances. Such works result from new innovations across all creative artistic expressions engaged in wider forms of collaboration, dialogic approaches and so forth, with a greater commitment to digital technologies and digital practices within live performance settings. In most European countries, this performative genre was disregarded, possibly due to its

unconventional character and the lack of knowledge of its aesthetic language, which often places it outside the traditions, institutions and discourses already established by opera or musical theatre. However, a renewed interest in sound, theatrical and performance elements, coupled with a concern with the preservation of valuable cultural heritage, has led to a resurgence of interest in the performative genre and its history, especially at a time of cultural, economic, and social instability, still even more accentuated by the current pandemic situation. Dealing with collaborative practices challenges musicologists thus needing to undertake musicological archaeology of the work while accessing the different types of documents, including technological tools such as graphic representations (scores, sonograms, spectrograms, formal schemes) or symbolic representations (such as computerized analytical descriptions of the work). But how do we systematically transpose this set of components into the archive? Answering this question inevitably incorporates the development of innovative methods and tools able to assist and automate the work of archivists and musicologists. To support this proposal, I will present as a case study the collection of composer Constança Capdeville, the greatest representative of the music theatre in Portugal.

Interdisciplinary implications. The preservation of music theatre works and other correlated collaborative practices generates documentation then available for long-term access, requiring an association between the practices of musicology and the approaches of archival science. Some possible approaches are: researching theoretically music theatre specificities and analysing music theatre documentation in the light of musicological and archival science methodologies to developing a new theoretical framework; investigating practice: documenting productions as part of the notion of the post-custodial archive. This would expand the traditional musicology restoration methods, thus contributing to the history of European culture while enabling a greater circulation of works and cultural goods. The intersection between musicology and archival science seeks to contribute to the access and understanding of these works, assisting archivists, academics, performers, producers, or users interested in such performative practices. It also reasons to provide an intergenerational dialogue (grandparents, parents and grandchildren) perpetuating the memory and legacy of countless artists involved with the experimental music theatre of the past and present, a fundamental contribution for the performing arts in Portugal and Europe until today not yet achieved.

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